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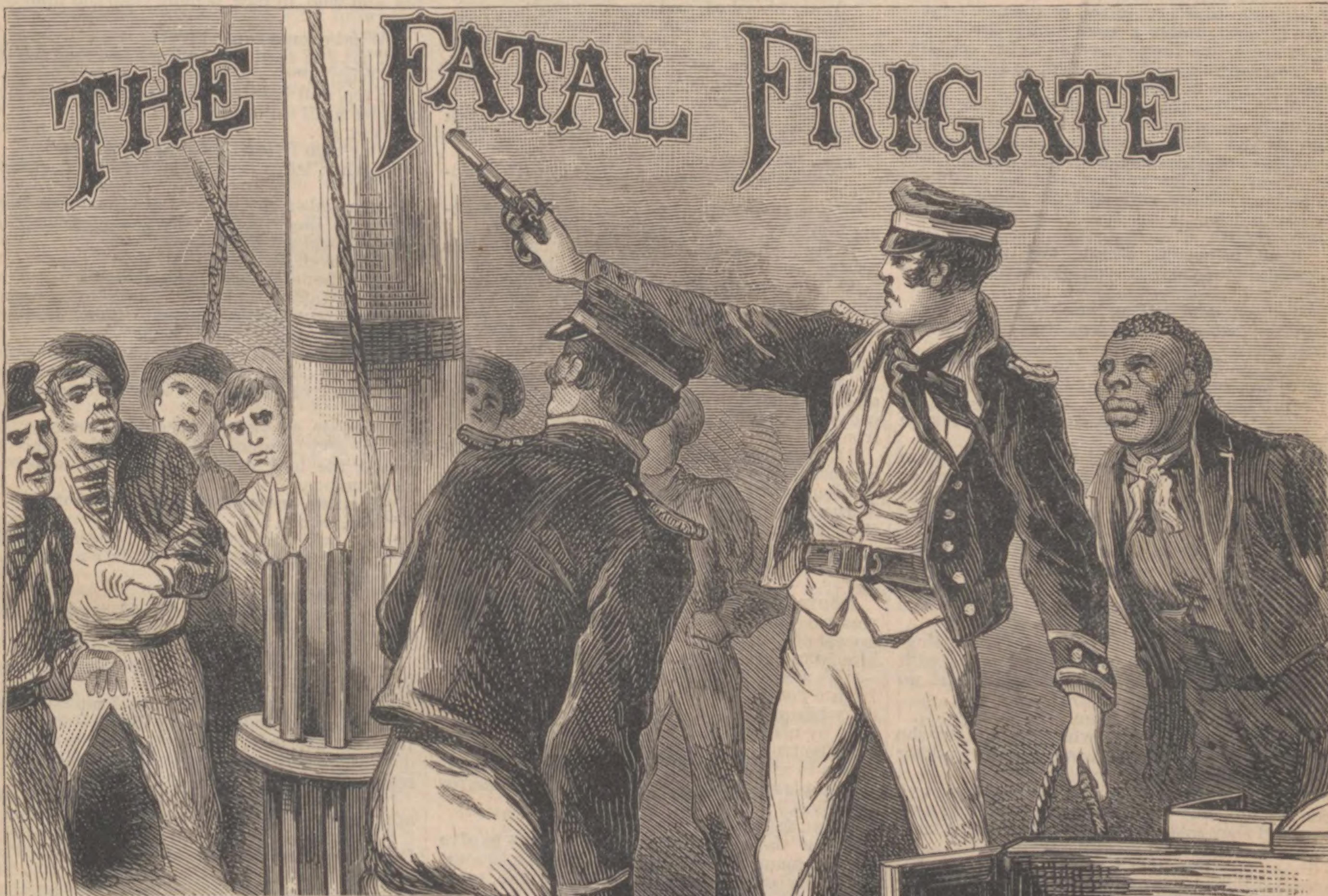
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OR, Rivals in Love and War.

A Romance of Ocean Mysteries
a Century Ago.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A RIVAL'S HATRED.

An old gentleman, wearing the uniform of an admiral of the English Navy over a century ago, sat in his luxurious quarters in an American sea-port city.

Upon a table near him were a number of papers of an official kind, an ink-horn, quill pens and a black sand-box, while a decanter of port wine also occupied a conspicuous place within reach of his hand, the glass near showing that it had been used.

The admiral's face was stern and his eyes had the look of a man whom it was dangerous to gain the ill will of.

Suddenly the door opened and a young officer

"THIS CORD I HOLD IS FAST AT THE OTHER END TO A MUSKET AIMED INTO THE MAGAZINE.
OBEY MY ORDERS, OR I BLOW THE FATAL FRIGATE INTO ETERNITY!"

The Fatal Frigate.

entered, the admiral glancing up, and not seeing his servant, who was on hand without, saying savagely:

"How dare you enter, sir, unannounced by my servant?"

The officer seemed not at all abashed by the greeting, but walked quickly forward and said:

"Father, Bonus saw no need of announcing your son."

"Why, Frank, my dear boy, I failed to recognize you."

"I saw the uniform, not your welcome face."

"Bless you, my noble boy, when did you arrive?"

"An hour ago, sir."

"And Captain Lonsdale?"

"Is on board the frigate, sir, and will report to you to-night."

"Well, Frank, what has he to report?"

"Father, he is more of a man than we thought," was the low reply.

"What do you mean?" asked the old man in a peevish kind of voice.

"Well, sir, we both thought that by sending Lionel Lonsdale out in that old frigate, and with a crew formed wholly of men in our pay, he would have trouble, and the command would have to be turned over to me to save the ship from a disgraceful mutiny, and he would be disgraced, and therefore not allowed to take command of the splendid new frigate, and I would become her commander."

"Of course, Frank, why review the reasons for placing Lonsdale in charge of the frigate Ill Omen, when I know so well all about the affair."

"What I did was done for you, for I have to appoint him to the command of the new frigate when finished, unless a good excuse for not doing so arose, and then you could be her captain."

"You urged it, and I yielded, as I always do where you are concerned."

"Well, father, it was worth the chance to set him aside, for if he got the new frigate he would not only cut me out of her, but also old Vernon would give him his daughter, Belle, which would throw me out of her millions, which I would get by making her my wife, and you know you are largely in debt, as am I, and her money would help us out."

"Egad, it would, Frank, and that fellow Lonsdale alone keeps you from winning the girl."

"Yes, sir; and getting the ship."

"True; but why did not matters turn out as I arranged?"

"Because Lonsdale is far more of a man than I gave him credit for."

"How so?"

"Well, sir, the men began to give trouble soon after we got out to sea."

"They said the frigate was haunted, as, in fact, I believe she is, ever since she was used as the prison-ship, when she was stationed in New York Harbor, and all of the French prisoners died on board—"

"There is said to be a reason for that, my son, for there were many Frenchmen on board who could tell bad tales in time of peace, and it was thought best that they should die, so it is said," and the admiral spoke in a whisper.

"I know that they all died, and even the English officers and crew in command, along with the young daughter of her commander and no wonder the frigate is haunted."

"But is she haunted, Frank?"

"Yes, sir, according to what the men say she is, for a woman in white has been seen walking the decks and wringing her hands."

"Where she comes from or where she goes no one can tell, but the men swear to having seen her, and they told Captain Lonsdale to put back to port, as the frigate was haunted."

"And he refused?"

"The man who asked it was told very plainly to go forward and let him hear no more such nonsense; but he said he would have the men take the ship back if they had to put the captain in irons."

"This was your man, I suppose?"

"Yes, father."

"Well?"

"As soon as he said that to Lonsdale he was a dead man, while the four who accompanied the spokesman were driven before the captain's sword-point into the cabin and put in irons."

"Then Lonsdale ordered the men to quarters, and calling to his officers to aid him, he wheeled the stern-pivots around to take the decks, and asked if there were any more mutineers among the crew."

"Why the fellow is a bold one, indeed, and I am sorry such a man stands in your way, my son."

"He is in my way, sir, and he must be gotten out of it, or I lose the new frigate and we are both swamped by our debts."

"That is true, boy, very true; but what then, for I cannot but admire that plucky fellow?" and the old admiral grew quite enthusiastic over the act of the man against whom he had allowed his son to plot.

"Why then sub-Lieutenant Ransom, and Reefer Le Roy stepped forward and said that they wished also to put back to port, as the frigate was not fit to go to sea, sir."

"These were the officers you promised promotion to, to back up the men?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what then?"

"Why father, I thought I heard a bugle, when Lonsdale's voice sung out:

"What! my officers mutineering also?

"Take the punishment I gave that other mutineer dog!"

"The crack of his pistol followed, sir, and Ransom fell dead, while Reefer Le Roy lost his head, and in his terror rushed to me to save him."

"Zounds! but this is growing interesting."

"What then, what then?" said the admiral, in his excitement turning the decanter of port up to his lips and ignoring the glass.

"Of course I hurled Le Roy from me, and drew my sword, for he had the look of a man who meant to betray me, and I would have run him through first."

"But he gave a shriek of terror and running to the side, sprung into the sea."

"Heavens and earth! but what a time!"

"Man overboard! lay the ship to, and lower the lifeboat," shouted Lonsdale, and the order was obeyed; but, to my joy the reefer was not found, for it was blowing hard, there was a rough sea on and it was very dark."

"I see; but go on, go on!"

"As the ship lay to, sir, Captain Lonsdale called out to know if there were any more mutineers on board, among officers or crew."

"They saw the two dead forms of Ransom and the boatswain, and knew their other four leaders were in irons in the cabin, and not a man spoke."

"Again he asked, and one man said:

"They say, sir, that you commanded the schooner-of-war Dart, sir, when she went down and you alone were saved."

"Will you tell us if it is true, sir?"

"It is," responded Lonsdale.

"Well, sir?" resumed the sailor, "if you will turn the command over to Lieutenant Fenton, sir, we will go on the cruise."

"What did Lonsdale say then?" asked the admiral.

"He walked boldly up to the speaker, thrusting himself right among the men, and said:

"My man, I was sent out in command of this frigate, and I shall so remain for this cruise."

"Do your duty and all will go well; but, if you attempt another mutiny with me, I will blow the ship and all on board into eternity!"

"That settled it," said the admiral, with enthusiasm.

"It did, sir, for Lionel Lonsdale was master, and going back to the cabin he ordered the officers to at once sit in trial over the four men in irons."

"Frank, my son, how can we longer plot against such a man?"

"Remember, father, the new frigate and old Vernon's millions," was the insinuating reply of the scheming lieutenant.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOTTERS.

ADMIRAL FENTON loved his ease too well, and was too deeply in debt to refuse to listen to the appeal of his son to a plan that would extricate him from his misfortunes, so he said:

"You are right, Frank, for with that new frigate you can capture prizes and get prize money, while you would certainly get a large fortune by marrying Miss Belle Vernon."

"The truth is, Lonsdale is a clever fellow, and I hate to set him aside; but self-preservation is the first law of nature, and we must look out for ourselves."

"Yes, father."

"Now the admiralty sent me orders to give the command of the new frigate Saturn to some deserving young officer, not an old one, mind you, and I thought of you."

"But then I knew that I would have the whole colony about my ears if I skipped over Lonsdale for you."

"True, father."

"Every tradesman would come down upon us for our debts, and I would be blamed at home when it was known."

"Yes, sir."

"If it was not for Lonsdale I could select you, as you are next in rank in my squadron, that the admiralty's orders cover, and nothing would be said, and so it was to get him set aside that I yielded to your suggestion, and sent the Ill Omen on a cruise after that French marauding frigate knowing he could never catch him, and expecting you to arrange it so that the men would force him to give over his command to you."

"But it failed through his splendid pluck."

"And he captured the Frenchman, sir."

"What?" and the admiral sprung to his feet with an alacrity that brought a howl of pain from him, as he had forgotten in his excitement that he was suffering with the gout.

"Yes, sir, he captured the Frenchman."

"Not the frigate Le Roy?"

"Yes, sir."

"What with?"

"The Ill Omen, sir."

"No!"

"Yes, father."

"I can hardly believe you, boy."

"It is true, nevertheless, father."

"Why the Ill Omen was hardly half-manned and in bad condition."

"True, sir, but we sighted the Le Roi off the St. Lawrence and just at sunset."

"Tell me of it, my boy, tell me of it."

"Captain Lonsdale at once beat to quarters, stripped for action and opened on the Frenchman, who returned the fire."

"We got to windward of him, poured in a terrific fire and kept it up until at close quarters, when we gave and took broadsides."

"We shot the bowsprit and mizzenmast of the Frenchman away, cut down some of his guns, and at last he struck, when if he had boarded us he would have carried the Ill Omen, for we had not half his force, and had lost fearfully."

"Taking the Frenchman in tow we came on here, sir."

"Frank?"

"Well, father?"

"Can we do anything now against Lonsdale?"

"Yes, sir."

"I cannot see how, my son."

"We can take his crew away from him."

"And his officers?"

"Yes, sir, you can order them off the frigate."

"But his orders to take command of the Ill Omen do not allow me to order him off, unless for cogent reasons."

"Let him remain there, sir."

"Alone on his frigate?"

"Yes, sir, with that giant negro servant of his, and who, in fact, is more comrade than servant."

"What excuse can I give?"

"That you need the officers and men for the new frigate."

"I see, and hold off the appointing her commander until the last?"

"Yes, sir."

"But then I fear I must appoint him."

"Father, leave it to me to arrange it in some way."

"Remember, my son, we are in an American port, and there is an ugly feeling among the colonists against Englishmen."

"I am well aware of that, sir."

"And Lonsdale is an American."

"True, father; but I will think up a way to prevent your having to appoint Lionel Lonsdale to the command of the Saturn."

"No underhand work, my son, for remember I could not countenance that," said the admiral, with a look of sublime virtue spreading over his face.

"Nor, sir, as your son, could I be guilty of a crime," and Lieutenant Frank Fenton's face reflected the look of virtue upon the admiral's countenance.

"Then we understand each other, Frank."

"Yes, father."

"But will the keeping of Lonsdale off the Saturn as commander, prevent his winning Belle Vernon?"

"Yes, father; it must."

"I see, for old Vernon would turn his back upon him."

"He would, sir, and Miss Vernon, too."

"They are Americans, remember, my son, and so is Lonsdale."

"I'll not forget that, sir; but I must have the Saturn, and I must marry Belle Vernon, and then we are safe, sir; but, overburdened by debt as we both are, it will not be well for us to make a failure."

"No, my son, but— What is it, sir?" and the admiral turned sharply to his liveried servant.

"Captain Lonsdale, sir, of the frigate Ill Omen, begs an interview with your Honor?"

"Admit him," was the response, and a moment after a young officer entered the admiral's room.

It was the hated rival in love and war of Lieutenant Frank Fenton.

CHAPTER III.

THE FATAL FRIGATE.

THE officer who entered the admiral's pleasant room, was a young man wearing the uniform of a captain in the Royal Navy, although he could not have been more than twenty-seven.

His form was elegant, yet athletic, his carriage dignified and martial, and his manners courteous.

His face was one to admire, for its frankness and courage, while intelligence and determination marked each feature.

An American by birth, with dark hair and eyes, he was in strange contrast to the red-faced admiral, and his blonde-haired, blue-eyed son, though the latter was a very handsome man, well formed, refined, and yet with a face and mien as stern as his father's.

Both of the young officers had won fame as sailors, the Englishman having been advanced rapidly, on account of his father's high rank, though he was really deserving of it, and the American having worked his way up from a cabin-boy, and by his daring acts commanded rapid advancement to the quarter-deck.

The Fatal Frigate.

Against Lionel Lonsdale Frank Fenton had no grievances.

He stood in the way of his commanding a splendid new vessel, and he was supposed to be favored more than any one else by Belle Vernon, a beauty, and the heiress of millions.

But for these two circumstances the two officers might have been friends; but still there was no feeling shown against Lonsdale by the admiral's son, for he was too shrewd for that, only it was rankling in his heart, and the young American had to be sacrificed.

The admiral was a *bon vivant*, and lived far beyond his means, his son following closely in his footsteps in that respect.

Stern to his inferiors, a genial gentleman with his equals, and as afraid of the admiralty and his king, as the young officers were of him, Admiral Mars Fenton was yet under the thumb of his only son.

What he punished other officers for he laughed at in his son, and the young man soon found out his power and commanded the admiral, forcing him, as the reader has seen, to do questionable acts to gain his ends.

It was through Frank Fenton's plot, that Lionel Lonsdale had been sent off on a cruise in the frigate.

The *Ill Omen* had been an unlucky vessel since the day she was launched in England, when she crushed a number of her workmen as she rushed into the water.

No sooner had her masts been placed in her than she was struck by lightning and several that were upon her decks had been killed, so that the king himself had christened her the *Ill Omen*.

When armed, manned and sent forth as a splendid vessel-of-war she had, one night of dense fog in the English channel, run down an East Indian packet ship and many were lost, and soon after she had been captured by two French line-of-battle ships, but was retaken by an English fleet.

Then she was ordered to America and her ill-fortune still dogged her wake, for she was dismantled in a storm and then taken as a prison-ship for New York harbor.

Here she remained until her prisoners and those in charge of them died mysteriously and suddenly; it was said some strange and deadly scourge had carried them off, but the affair was hushed up and never investigated.

On account of the mutterings of war around the colonies, the *Ill Omen* was fitted up and again put in commission, a dashing young officer being placed in command.

But the men liked not the craft, and when their captain was killed in his cabin by the accidental discharge of his pistol, the men deserted in a body, and the vessel was for months without a soul on board, or any one caring in fact to go there.

It was about this time that Lionel Lonsdale was ordered to report for duty to Admiral Fenton.

He had risen from a cabin-boy, it was said; had gotten a middy's berth for saving the life of his commander, and when not twenty-two was placed in command of a privateer.

He rendered service that made his name famous, and was ordered back into the regular service to command a brig-of-war.

In an action with a French sloop, treble his size, he fought on, as he fled, and under the cover of the night he escaped his large foe, and a storm coming up his craft went down.

He alone survived, and, clinging to a spar he was picked up the next day by the French sloop, who, finding out who he was, and admiring his matchless courage, refused to hold him prisoner, but landed him under a flag of truce with the French captain's own statement of the affair.

Reporting for duty at once, Lionel Lonsdale had been sent to Admiral Fenton.

Young, handsome, famous, with a large sum of prize-money to his credit; he became a lion in society, and thus it was he drifted across the path of Frank Fenton, who had been the admired of all until Lonsdale appeared.

Seeing that he was in his way, as far as love and promotion were concerned, the fertile brain of Frank Fenton had urged his father to send Captain Lonsdale to sea in the *Ill Omen*, with a crew of picked men, and certain officers who were true to him, and thus, by a mutiny, crush the rising fame of the young commander.

A French frigate that had late done much damage along the coast had been the nominal object of the cruise, and Lieutenant Fenton had himself gone as second in command to play the hero in the mutiny that was to deprive Lionel Lonsdale of his command.

It was a well-arranged plot, for if seamen mutinied under Captain Lonsdale, he could not be given the *Saturn*, the new frigate to command, while, suffering under such a death-blow to his aspirations and ambition, he certainly could not presume to ask for the hand of Belle Vernon, the heiress of millions.

But the story told the admiral by the arch plotter, showed how Captain Lonsdale had quelled the mutiny, and then, not at all prepared to battle with the splendid French frigate, had made her strike her colors and carried her

into port a prize, thus breaking the bad luck of the *Ill Omen* which had come to be known as the Fatal Frigate.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW.

WHEN Lionel Lonsdale entered the admiral's spacious sitting-room, he seemed to feel that his lieutenant had told all that had occurred, for the looks of the father and son showed it.

But the admiral greeted him cordially and said: "Be seated, Captain Lonsdale, and Frank, have some glasses and liquors brought, for perhaps the captain does not care for port."

Lionel Lonsdale took the chair to which the admiral motioned him, and Frank Fenton, without moving from his seat called out to the servant to bring wine and refreshments, his father gently reproving him.

"Pardon me, admiral, I forgot that you were in uniform," said Frank, in his indifferent way.

"I have a report to make to you, Admiral Fenton, of my cruise," said Captain Lonsdale, quietly.

"Lieutenant Fenton tells me you captured the *Le Roi*."

"Yes, sir."

"Did she have her full complement of men and guns on board?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And yet you took her with a vessel that was by no means her equal?"

"I supposed that she was, sir, when you ordered me in chase of her."

The admiral winced, and Frank Fenton frowned, for he saw that the young captain had given his father a telling shot.

"Ahem! Well, yes, you were his superior, as I knew you would be when I ordered you in search of him, for I hold, Captain Lonsdale—I hold, sir, that an Englishman is equal to two Frenchmen, and I knew you would whip the *Le Roi*, and I wanted you to add to your fame by your signal victory."

The captain smiled, for the admiral had extricated himself in a masterly manner from his former speech.

"Well, admiral, we captured him after an action of two hours, but he was badly crippled, and we had to tow him into port, while the losses on both sides were heavy."

"I shall report your victory, Captain Lonsdale, as it deserves, and I hope that my son behaved nobly, for I would like to say a word of him, too, to the Admiralty."

"Lieutenant Fenton's conduct was such, admiral, that you can say all you wish in his favor, while my other officers and the crew behaved with marked courage, as you may know when they fought two to one."

"I shall speak of all, sir—all of them; but was there not some trouble beforehand?"

"Yes, sir; but I hope the after good conduct of the men will permit that to be overlooked."

"What was the trouble, sir?"

"It seems, sir, that the men are afraid of the frigate, calling her haunted, and also that they feared to sail under me, as I lost my brig and was the only survivor."

"But they gave you no real trouble?"

"Very little, sir, after I was forced to kill an officer and the ringleader among the crew, while a middy jumped overboard in his fright and was lost."

"This is very bad, very bad, Captain Lonsdale."

"It was a case, sir, where I had to master, or be mastered."

"The men wished Lieutenant Fenton to take command, but I would not be bullied, sir, and Lieutenant Fenton, I wish to say, ably supported me."

"I am glad to hear that, sir, very glad."

"I will mention it in my report, Captain Lonsdale, how nobly my son behaved," said the admiral, while, for shame, the face of Frank Fenton flushed scarlet.

"And now, sir, what is it you desire to do, Captain Lonsdale?"

"To still remain in command of the Fatal Frigate, sir, as her ill-fortune seems to have at last deserted her."

"She is a mere tub, sir, a mere tub."

"Have you seen her, admiral?"

"Only at a distance."

"Then you have been misinformed regarding her, for the *Ill Omen* is as beautiful a craft as is afloat."

"She is built a good deal upon the model of the East Indian packet-ships, and carries a vast amount of canvas, while, blow hard or blow light, she is very fast, and we walked right up to windward of the Frenchman in splendid style."

"But she has such a spooky name no one will command her."

"I have that honor at present, sir, and hope long to do so."

"But no crew will sail in her."

"Her present crew will, sir, I think, or at least many of them."

"Men are what we need now, Captain Lonsdale, first-class seamen, and I wish every man of those on board the *Ill Omen* for the new frigate, and they must go aboard at once."

"And who is to command the *Saturn*, sir, if I may ask?"

"Ahem! well I have not yet fully decided, for the orders, you know, will come from the Admiralty."

"She is American built, and a superb craft, as I have reported to the Admiralty, and I will be glad to appoint some good officer to command her."

"In the mean time I will place my son on board in charge, until it is decided who her captain shall be."

"And you will strip me of my crew, sir?"

"I shall be compelled so to do, you know."

"But not of my command of the frigate?"

"Oh, no, you can still command the frigate; but where you can get a single seaman in these times to man her, I cannot tell."

"Seamen are scarce, sir, and it will be hard to get a crew for the *Saturn*; but still I will keep command of the *Ill Omen*, and I suppose I have your permission to put to sea in her, if I can man her?"

"Ah, yes, certainly."

"And my cruising orders can be unlimited, sir, I suppose?"

"Yes, but you'll never get to sea in that craft, my dear Lonsdale."

"She needs fitting up, sir, and—"

"Not a guinea will I ever pay to put on that old craft, Captain Lonsdale, not a guinea, for I know she is useless, and neither officers or men will sail in her, not one."

"I am one, admiral," was the quiet response.

"Then you fly in the face of Providence in doing so, and are the only one," hotly said the admiral.

"If I do not retain my command of the Fatal Frigate, admiral, what am I to do?"

"Remain under waiting orders, sir."

"I prefer active service, sir, and as you will not, for the Admiralty, spend a guinea on the *Ill Omen*, I will fit her out at my own expense, and, as the French frigate is my prize, and superbly fitted out, I shall take from her what guns, small-arms and other equipments I need."

The admiral grew still redder in the face with anger, and Frank Fenton bristled up while he said:

"The new frigate will need what we can get from the Frenchman, Captain Lonsdale."

"My dear Lieutenant Fenton, you seem to forget that the French frigate is my prize, and that I am allowed to take from a captured vessel what I may need for my own equipment, before I deliver her over to the proper authorities."

"I have not done that yet, and I therefore claim as my right, all that I deem necessary for the complete outfit of the *Ill Omen*."

"But we will need all for the *Saturn*, as my son, says," the admiral remarked, controlling his temper, for he knew that the young captain was right.

"May I ask what you would have done for the equipment of the *Saturn*, admiral, if I had not captured the French Frigate?"

Again the admiral winced, but he rallied with:

"Ahem, sir, ahem! we would have done the best we could."

"It would be a good idea, sir, if you would allow me to suggest it, to fit the *Le Roi* out also, for she is a fine vessel indeed, through it would take some time to get her to sea in her present crippled state."

"I shall think of that, sir, I shall think of that; but in the mean time you are to turn the prize over to the port captain to-morrow, and, as you insist upon it, you can retain your command of the *Ill Omen*."

"Thank you, sir, and I will turn the prize over when I have taken from her what I need for my vessel," was the firm reply.

The admiral seemed about to argue the matter when he received a warning glance from his son, so he said somewhat rudely:

"Egad, sir, you are welcome to what you wish; but you'll simply be acting as keeper of the frigate, for not a man can I order to you until the *Saturn* is manned and gone to sea."

"Still I have your permission to ship a crew myself, admiral?"

"Yes, sir, yes!" and the admiral spoke so sharply that the young captain arose, bowed and took his departure, leaving father and son once more together.

CHAPTER V.

VERNON HALL.

At the time of which I write, millionaires were few and far between in the American Colonies.

But yet, Hiram Vernon, a shipping merchant, had made his millions and was enjoying them.

He had counted his ships by the score, and had fitted out several fleet privateers, reaping rich rewards therefrom, until he was noted as the wealthiest man in the colonies.

His home was the grandest in the seaport town where the first scenes of my story open, and to be a guest at Vernon Hall was a favor that all citizens were anxious to enjoy.

With but two children, a son and a daughter, and the former said to be a *mauvais sujet*, it was well known that Belle Vernon would

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be an heiress to a very large fortune, for no one expected ever to see Harold Vernon again, as he had fled to sea when but nineteen, to escape punishment for taking the life of a comrade over a game of cards.

From that day the name of Harold Vernon was never mentioned in the family circle, and his father seemed to have utterly cast him out of his heart, where the handsome, impulsive but wild boy had held a warm place.

Once he had gone from his home, "Commodore" Vernon, as he was called by courtesy, from his commanding a fleet of merchant vessels, bestowed all of his affections upon his daughter Belle, four years the junior of her brother, and at the time when she is presented to the reader, in her nineteenth year.

A beautiful gift, with a willowy form, graceful in every motion, and a character that was as lovely as her face, she was admired and esteemed by all who knew her, while she seemed to have fairly bewitched the officers of the army and navy, not to speak of the young aristocrats of the town who could not boast of a uniform as an extra attraction.

Vernon Hall was one of the most substantial as well as beautiful houses in New England.

It boasted acres of ornamental grounds, a park of fair proportions, all surrounded by a stone wall.

There were velvet-like lawns, flower gardens, and innumerable winding paths.

The mansion was situated upon a rise of ground, and though within the limits of the town, and surrounded by many other handsome homes, its many acres caused it to appear like a country seat.

Built of stone, it was large, rambling and had many fine rooms in it, and its parlors would accommodate several hundred guests, while in the spacious dining room as many as forty had sat down to dinner at one time.

Commodore Vernon had inherited the home from his father, who had built it, and he had been, like his father a good liver and fond of society.

The wealthiest man in town his home was naturally the resort of all the prominent people, and when Admiral Fenton became commander of the squadron in those waters, he had at once been invited to Vernon Hall, and thus had his son met Belle Vernon, who had charmed him as much by her loveliness, as with the inheritance she was to receive.

The admiral told a good story, praised good wine and was popular with Commodore Vernon.

His son danced to perfection, was noted as a splendid sailor and daring man, had seen much of the world, though young, sung well, sketched passably, was a good horseman and could entertain a room full by his brilliant conversational powers.

There were plenty of girls in the town who would have been glad to marry Lieutenant Fenton; but he was far-seeing, in his own selfish way, and knew that Belle Vernon had the largest fortune, while certainly she was the peer in beauty, if not the superior of any of them.

Coming home on the evening following the arrival of the Fatal Frigate in port, with the Le Roi as a prize, the commodore at once made the news known to his daughter, as he put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and took his favorite seat by the table.

"That young man Lonsdale has distinguished himself, certainly, Belle, and deserves great credit; but there was a mutiny on board, owing to the men not wishing to serve on the Haunted Ship, as they call the Ill Omen, and it would have been very serious, but for the gallantry of Lieutenant Fenton."

"What did he do, father?" quietly asked Belle, looking up from her embroidery.

"Well I don't know exactly, though the admiral told me how daring he was."

"A father's praise of an only son, sir?" said Belle with a smile.

"Don't be severe, my child, for young Fenton is a gallant fellow, and, by the way, he called upon me to-day."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, and he begged the honor of proposing for your hand, as he said you had given him reason to suppose you liked him."

"I do, sir, like him very much; but your answer, father?"

"Well, I could give but one answer, you know, for the admiral is the only brother of Lord Angus, and as the latter is unmarried will get the title and estates at his brother's death, for the nobleman is ten years his senior, a bachelor and likely to die soon, and young Fenton will be the heir anyhow."

"I have heard the Angus estates were mortgaged for full value, father, so the title and debts will be all the admiral or his son will inherit."

"Don't be severe, my child, for the title is a great deal, and I have money enough to free the estates of the mortgages; but supper is ready, and we will talk it over afterward."

But he attributed it to the fact of Lieutenant Frank Fenton's offer for her hand, and said to himself:

"We will talk it over after supper and arrange all."

Upon adjourning to the sitting-room once more, Belle drew her chair nearer to her father, and said:

"Father, what was your answer to Lieutenant Fenton, when he asked for my hand?"

"Why, my child, you surprise me!"

"How so, sir?"

"To ask such a question."

"You refused, then?" and Belle smiled.

"Refused! No, indeed, I did not refuse, for I told him he had my consent to go in and win."

"And he thought that he could do so?"

"Well, yes."

"Well, father, I am sorry to go against your wishes, but Lieutenant Fenton has no chance of winning my love."

The commodore looked astounded.

He lowered his gold glasses from his forehead and looked straight at her.

"Zounds! child, what do you mean?"

"Just what I say, father."

"You surely will not refuse him?"

"Yes, father."

"A presumptive lord?"

"I care not for his title."

"His father is one of the most prominent Englishmen in the colonies, and his word is law here."

"That may be, sir."

"And his son holds high rank for his years, and will doubtless be the commander of the new frigate."

"Will he be appointed, father, over the head of Captain Lonsdale, to the command of a vessel more sought after than any other in the colonies?"

"Well, now, I had forgotten Lonsdale."

"Would it be right, sir?"

"No; but it seems to me Admiral Fenton told me that Lonsdale preferred to keep command of the Ill Omen."

"I sincerely hope not, sir, for that craft seems fatal to all who have aught to do with her."

"He seems to have captured the French frigate with her, and yet was but half the strength of his foe."

"Then that certainly should get him the command of the Saturn, independent of his rank over Lieutenant Fenton."

"Egad, but you are right, Belle; but then the admiral has full power from the Admiralty, and he will doubtless appoint his son."

"Because he is his son, and more, because Captain Lonsdale is an American."

"You seem to take the part of young Lonsdale to a wonderful extent, my child?" and the commodore looked at her suspiciously through his spectacles.

"I take the side of justice, father."

"But do you mean that you will refuse Fenton's offer?"

"I will, sir, most assuredly."

"Still, Belle, you have encouraged young Fenton, certainly."

"I like him, and he was different from those I knew, of the army, navy and townsmen."

"You have ridden out with him, sailed on the harbor in a little yacht, and accepted his attentions in a marked degree, until of late."

"I have done the same with others, sir."

"Yes, particularly with Captain Lonsdale, who seems to have become a dangerous rival of young Fenton."

"Father, you know both men, so which would you rather I should marry?"

"What! has Lonsdale asked you to marry him?" hotly said the old merchant.

"No, father."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I asked you, as you know both men, which would you rather see me the wife of?"

"Well, Fenton's title—"

"I mean outside of title, sir."

"I rather like Captain Lonsdale, and—"

"Say they are both lieutenants, with nothing but their pay, no titles, only their appearance, character and courage to recommend them, sir, which would you choose for my husband?"

"I would say Lonsdale, as far as I know him, for he has risen without an admiral to push him, and somehow he seems more sincere than Fenton; but then he is a nobody from nowhere, was a fisher lad, I bear, on the coast about Portland, and that is all that is known of him."

"He has worked himself up to a captaincy in the king's navy, and it is that much to his credit."

"True."

"He is handsome, a gentleman, possesses a better education than most of the men of today, and I think he is a man of noble nature, not given to the wild orgies of young officers nowadays."

"Why, Belle, are you in love with this man?"

"Father, a woman of true spirit never gives her love unasked; but I like Captain Lonsdale, and when I met him, and the two, he and Fen-

ton, were compared, I confess that the comparison was a trifle odious to the admiral's son."

"Well, I could never consent to your marrying a nobody, my child."

"The question of marriage, sir, was only broached as far as Lieutenant Fenton was concerned."

"Still, if I thought that you meant to fall in love with Lonsdale, I would forbid you the house."

"Father, let me tell you a secret that I found out."

"Well, my child?"

"Have you ever discovered who it was who saved your life the night those three revengeful seamen, whom you discharged, waylaid you on your way home?"

"No, and I would give much to do so, for I have wished to reward him."

"But I posted notices up everywhere, and advertised in the paper, asking him to make himself known."

"He risked his life, did he not, sir?"

"Yes, for two of the men turned upon him while the third held me under his pistol; but he quickly shot one, knocked the other down, and seizing the third, hurled him on top of his fallen comrade, holding them until I went for aid."

"I only wish he had not slipped away before I could thank him, but his letter telling me that I need not expect him to appear, as he cared not for thanks and needed no reward, simply made me the more anxious to find him."

"You put that letter in your desk, father, and upon receiving a note to-day, the writing struck me as familiar, and I at last recognized it as the peculiar hand in which that stranger's epistle to you was written, sir."

"I'll get yours, and here is mine."

"Are they written by the same person?"

"Indeed they are; there can be no mistake about that."

"But who is your note from?"

"Look on the other page and see the name, sir."

The commodore obeyed, and he cried out:

"Lionel Lonsdale!"

Just then the door opened and a servant announced:

"Captain Lionel Lonsdale."

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE old commodore fairly sprung to his feet as the name was announced, when Captain Lonsdale crossed the threshold:

"Bless my soul, Lonsdale, we were just speaking of you, and you appear."

"You know the old saying, Commodore Vernon, 'Speak of Old Nick and his imp will appear,' but I feel flattered to have been the subject of conversation from whatever cause."

"Lonsdale, you have never given me an opportunity to do what I now wish to do, thank you for saving my life, not to speak of a large sum of money I had with me the night you rescued me from those three sailor-footpads."

"I rescue you, sir?" but the face of the young captain turned scarlet.

"You can deny it no longer, Captain Lonsdale, for you have betrayed yourself," said Belle Vernon laughingly.

"In what way, pray?"

"Are not this note and this letter written by one and the same person?" and she produced the letter written her father anonymously, and her own note.

"I must acknowledge the truth, I suppose, for my writing has betrayed me; but, commodore, as I was just coming into town under orders, when I was so fortunate as to serve you, and as I dislike publicity, I determined to keep quiet upon the subject, for no one knew me, and I wrote you the note to set your mind at rest as regarded thanks and a reward."

"Writing to Miss Vernon to-day, to ask if I might call this evening, I little thought of being betrayed by my letter to you, which I had simply signed 'A Friend.'

"It gives me pleasure now, Captain Lonsdale, to know who my brave preserver was, and I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never repay."

"But permit me to congratulate you upon your victory over the Le Roi, and I learn that you had only men enough to man one broadside at a time, and had had to shift your gunners as you needed different broadsides."

"It is true, sir; we were not the equal of the enemy in guns or men; but our fire was well delivered and we crippled him badly and forced him to strike; but, Commodore Vernon, I wished to ask your advice upon a subject, sir, that I hope will be considered confidential—nay, Miss Vernon, you are not to be excluded, for I wish your advice also."

"A proposal, sure?" thought the commodore, while aloud he said:

"Any advice that I can give you, Captain Lonsdale, I shall gladly do so."

"Thank you, sir; I felt that you would give me your candid opinion, especially as, I may say, I have no friend, not even a brother officer whom I can call upon."

"The truth is, Admiral Fenton seems determined to act toward me in a manner that I cannot comprehend, for, when ordered to duty un-

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEIRESS.

DURING supper Belle Vernon was very quiet, not at all like herself, her father thought.

der him, I found myself ranking captain, and, by rights, should have been placed in command of the *Saturn*.

"But he kept me idle for some time, and then sent me on board a vessel which no officer would take on account of the ill-fortune that has dogged her from the day she was built."

"With half a crew, many guns in poor condition, and the vessel hardly ship-shape, I was sent to sea to capture the *Le Roi*.

"We had not been out two days before a mutiny broke out among the men, and I was forced to take a very decided stand to quell it, for the men were superstitious, said the frigate was haunted, and the officers seemed to me to be very indifferent under the circumstances, as though they wished to return, as the crew demanded I should, or give up the captaincy to Lieutenant Fenton.

"I declined to do either, as you may suppose, and, after the death of an officer and the boatswain by shooting, and the springing overboard of a midshipman who expected like punishment, the mutiny was quelled."

"I suppose Lieutenant Fenton killed the officer and seaman, sir," said Belle, in her quiet way.

"No. Lieutenant Fenton took no part in quelling the mutiny, Miss Vernon, though, when I called upon him to uphold me he did so, as did the rest of the officers."

"Again, when we sighted the Frenchman the men seemed to desire to run from him, but this desire was checked, as I told them they should fight, or I would blow up the ship."

"And, egad, Lonsdale, you would have done it, or I am mistaken in you," cried the commodore.

"I had a hard crew to command, commodore, and had to threaten violent measures, sir; but I speak of this, sir, to show that, having captured the *Le Roi*, I naturally expected to command the *Saturn*.

"But upon reporting to the admiral last night, I found his son with him, and though he said nothing really, I could see that he influenced his father, and the result was that I am ordered to retain command of the *Ill Omen*."

"That is a shame!" hotly said Belle.

"It is wrong, certainly, Lonsdale."

"But that is not all, sir, for though I would be willing to command the *Ill Omen*, as she is an exceptionally fine sea-boat, and very fleet, I am deprived of my crew."

"Your crew taken from you?"

"Yes, commodore, the admiral told me last night he would order the officers and crew on board the *Saturn*, as she is now nearly completed, and Lieutenant Fenton is to take command of her until she is ready for sea, which means that he will be appointed her captain over my head."

"It seems so, sir."

"I expect it, sir; but I told the admiral I would still retain command of the *Ill Omen*, and, as I had unlimited cruising orders, would sail in her."

"But your crew?"

"Consists at present, commodore, of myself and my negro-servant, Brandywine."

"Have all been taken from you, Lonsdale?" asked the commodore in amazement.

"Every one, sir, and Brandywine and the ghosts of her former crews hold the ship until my return," said Lionel Lonsdale, with a smile.

"I cannot understand this in Admiral Fenton," said the commodore.

"He needs the men, sir, for the new frigate, and he will need as many more besides to man her, while they are really afraid of the *Ill Omen*, and many would refuse to sail in her again, I suppose, though I would not care for that."

"Another reason is, that Admiral Fenton has a son he desires to advance to a captaincy," Belle remarked.

"But, what will you do, Captain Lonsdale?"

"Retain command of the *Ill Omen*."

"But will Admiral Fenton permit it?"

"He cannot help it, sir, as I was ordered to special duty on the *Ill Omen* for an unlimited time, and he cannot remove me without cause, while, if he did relieve me of command of the Fatal Frigate, he would have to assign me to duty, and the *Saturn* is the only vessel I could go in, and so he prefers I should remain as captain of the Haunted Ship, for it permits Lieutenant Fenton to take charge of the new frigate."

"This is a strange proceeding, Lieutenant Lonsdale."

"It does not seem strange to me, father, for it is the admiral's shrewdness to get his son in the place that belongs to Captain Lonsdale," responded Belle.

"But what will you do, Lonsdale?"

"That, sir, is what I wished to ask your advice upon, for I wonder if it is possible for me to get a crew?"

"You certainly would not go to sea again in that doomed craft?"

"Yes, commodore, for I have her at the shipyard now, making certain changes in her rig I deem necessary, fitting her up thoroughly, and placing on board of her a complete outfit in large guns and small-arms from the *Le Roi*."

"But does the admiral allow this?"

"Again he cannot help himself, sir, as the *Le Roi* is my prize, and I can take from her what I deem I need for my vessel, until I turn her over to the port captain, and that I will do to-morrow, while what is being done to put her in fine condition, I am myself paying for, as Admiral Fenton said the Government should not waste a dollar upon her."

"Such is my story, sir, and the Fatal Frigate will be ready for sea within the week, as I have a large force upon her at work, and I ask you to advise me as to how I can get a crew, for I shall need three hundred and fifty good men."

"I wish I could advise you, Captain Lonsdale, but it will be utterly impossible for you to get fifty men, I am sure, for there are not in the entire ports of Massachusetts that many seamen you can call on; while I do not believe a dozen sailors could be found to go to sea in that fatal vessel," and the commodore spoke impressively.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROMISE.

THE story told by Lionel Lonsdale seemed to impress both the commodore and Belle deeply.

He had not seemed to wish them to believe the admiral was plotting against him, and yet they could not but see that both the old naval officer and his son were glad that the young captain decided to remain in charge of the *Ill Omen*, for it left the lieutenant free to command the new frigate.

"Suppose you left the *Ill Omen*, Captain Lonsdale, where would you go?"

"I am under the command of Admiral Fenton, Miss Vernon, and should simply have to remain in port, awaiting orders from him."

"Could he send the new frigate to sea with his son in command, while you were awaiting orders?"

"Yes, Miss Vernon, he could do so, but it would be an injustice to send a frigate, new, armed and manned thoroughly, to sea, while a captain was in port applying for orders, and, in the few months he had been under the admiral's command, had taken an enemy's vessel that for a year had been the scourge of the coast."

"Do not think I am boasting, please, for I am only showing you what an injustice a superior officer can do, if he likes."

"You should have the new frigate, certainly, Lonsdale."

"I do not ask it, nor do I care for her, commodore, for I will take the *Ill Omen*, if he will only give me a crew, and let his son follow to sea with the *Saturn* when she is ready."

"He certainly can ask no more."

"But he does, for he knows it will be hard to get another crew for the *Saturn*, and takes mine from me, but leaves me in command of the Fatal Frigate."

"Then my advice to you is to remain quietly on board the *Ill Omen*, let the admiral send his son on the *Saturn*, and then put your case before the Admiralty."

"I am an American, commodore, and my appeal would not be listened to by the English Admiralty."

"That is true; but then, it will be impossible for you to get a crew."

"Well, sir, I thank you for listening to my story of injustice, and will not trouble you any more; but I wished you to know that it was no fault of mine that I did not go to sea again, either in the *Ill Omen*, or in the *Saturn*, when ready, for in these times the duty of sailors is to be fighting our battles upon the ocean."

"You are right, Captain Lonsdale, and France is giving England a great deal of trouble now in our waters; but I hope the admiral will think better of his intentions, and give you your rights," and the commodore left the room to see some of his workmen who had called to see him upon matters of business.

"Miss Vernon, may I say to you what I did not tell your father?" asked Lionel Lonsdale, when he was alone with the maiden.

She looked surprised, but said in her frank way:

"Any confidence that you care to place in me, Captain Lonsdale, I will appreciate."

"It is simply this, that I am going to sea within the week, and with a crew, I may say, well fitted for a vessel bearing the name of the Fatal Frigate."

"More I cannot say to you, but, if I am spoken of unkindly after I am gone, I trust you will think of me differently from others, and be a sured that I have done no great wrong."

"You surprise me, Captain Lonsdale, for what can you mean?" said Belle Vernon.

"I cannot explain to you what I will do, but I will go to sea with a crew in spite of the admiral, and those who go with me will be men well-fitted for the *Ill Omen*.

"More I cannot tell you, but I asked the advice of your father, hoping that he could enable me to get a crew of good men; but he says it is impossible for me to procure men, and so I will take my own way."

"Only, Miss Vernon, I wish to feel that you will not think unkindly of me, nor feel that I am one who would turn to crime."

"With your good wishes and respect I can better stand what others will say."

"Will you trust me, and say that one of these days we may meet again?"

What his strange words meant Belle Vernon could not divine.

He seemed to hint at the doing of some deed akin to crime, and yet he asked for her respect, her trust in him, and a pledge that he might meet her again.

It was a hard thing to trust any man under such circumstances.

She had heard his story of the admiral's injustice toward him, and he had asked that what he had said might be confidential.

He was known to her only as a daring and skillful young sailor, who had risen from a coast fisher-lad to the high rank he then held.

A gentleman he certainly appeared, and more she knew not.

But yet there was that about him that had won her to him from their first meeting.

He was fascinating to a wonderful degree, and his quiet manner seemed to have won for him many friends.

Now, alone, excepting his negro servant, on board a vessel said to be haunted by innumerable ghosts,* and certainly by most weird and unhappy memories, he was quietly fitting her out for sea at his own expense, and, though her father had told him to get fifty men would be impossible, and no one in fact to sail in that fatal craft, he coolly told her he should have a full crew and sail within a week.

And he asked her to trust him.

These thoughts flashed through the mind of Belle Vernon, as he stood before her, for he had risen to take his departure, and for an instant she was silent.

Then she looked into those earnest dark eyes gazing down upon her, and she answered frankly:

"I will trust you, and I hope we may meet again."

"From my heart I thank you, and I believe you."

"Good-by."

He bent over and kissed her hand, and a moment after was gone.

As he passed out into the hall, Seward the butler was opening the door to admit other visitors.

They were Admiral and Lieutenant Fenton.

"Ah, Lonsdale, what officer is in command of your ship now that you are absent?" said the admiral facetiously, for he well knew that not a seaman had been left on board by his orders.

"The one who took the place of Lieutenant Fenton as my first officer, sir—my negro servant Brandywine," was the stinging retort, and the admiral having offered the banter was forced to put up with the response, as he passed on muttering:

"Zounds, sir, zounds!"

"Father, I think I should resent that as an insult," whispered Lieutenant Fenton.

"And get run through the heart for your trouble; no, let it pass, for I brought the remark out."

"You forget, sir, that I am the best swordsman in the king's navy?"

"True, I never thought of that; it might be a good way to help me out of this *Saturn* scrape, for I could not order him to duty if he was severely wounded, or dead?" and the father and son passed on into the sitting-room, where Seward had already announced them.

"I hope our coming did not run your visitor off, Miss Vernon?" said Lieutenant Fenton, after greeting the maiden and her father, who had returned to the room, and there taken a seat near the heiress.

"Oh, no, sir, for Captain Lonsdale had said good-evening before you were announced."

"I suppose he told you of the splendid victory we won over the *Le Roi*?"

"He had very little to say upon the subject, Lieutenant Fenton, as he appears to be very modest over his achievements."

"I never saw men fight as our crew did," said Frank Fenton, feeling a trifle uncomfortable.

"A good commander, sir, it is said, makes good officers and crew."

Frank Fenton found, and felt still more uncomfortable, but replied:

"I am sorry Lonsdale has taken the course he has, of remaining alone on that old haunted tub, rather than in comfort ashore, awaiting orders; but he knows best."

"Did he tell you what he intended doing, Miss Vernon? for I fear he feels unkindly toward me for some reason."

"He said that he hoped to get a crew and go to sea."

"He can never get the men."

"So my father told him, sir."

Frank Fenton was not in as happy a frame of mind as was his wont, for somehow Belle Vernon did not treat him as he had hoped, after having asked her father that very morning to be allowed to offer himself to her.

The commodore however was in a good-humor, and knowing the admiral's weakness his

* A hundred years ago superstition pervaded nearly all minds to a wonderful extent.—THE AUTHOR.

best port was brought out, and a game of *whist* was proposed by Belle, which at once ended her *tete-a-tete* with the young lieutenant for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER IX. THE INSULT.

THE officers of the army and navy, stationed in town, were wont to assemble at a mansion known as Military Hall, and which was half-club, half-inn, and a place where there was good cheer, added to sports of various kinds that those with plenty of cash were wont to indulge in.

The young aristocrats, too, and old ones for that matter, also had the *entree* to Military Hall, and the dawn often found a goodly number of the representations of the army, navy and civil life there indulging in games of chance, or whiling the night away in social intercourse in which rare old wines played a conspicuous part.

It was to Military Hall that Lionel Lonsdale made his way after leaving the house of Commodore Vernon.

He had become a favorite in town, and though a frequenter of the Hall was not wont to either drink deeply or play for heavy sums.

His grand exploit in capturing the French frigate had become known to all, and his coming into the general assembly soon was greeted with a cheer of welcome, to which he responded with bows of thanks.

Recognizing several officers with whom he had been most intimate, he retired to a cosey room for a supper, and the talk turned upon his cruise.

"What is the cause of this talk I hear, Lonsdale, that there was a mutiny on board your ship, and but for Fenton you would have had to put back to port?" asked Major Bent Branscombe, a handsome young officer of the King's Dragoons, a crack command in the Colonies at the time.

"I had not heard of it, major, for nothing of the kind occurred," was the quiet reply.

"It certainly is going the rounds, for several have spoken to me upon the subject, while others say that the men would not have fought the ship when you sighted the Frenchman."

"It is a mistake, for the men fought the ship in preference to being blown up, as I threatened them, unless they did so; but from whence come these stories, Branscombe?"

"I have heard them drifting about, but cannot place them on anyone, though Loyd of the Hussars, Bancroft of the Infantry and Doan of the navy all asked me about them."

"It seems I have some enemy who is circulating these stories, and I would like to ask if any of you have seen one of the officers present who sailed under me on the *Ill Omen*?" and Captain Lonsdale appealed to the half dozen gentlemen present, two of whom were naval officers, and one a civilian.

"Yes, there have nearly all of them been in this evening, and Latimer is in the card-room now."

"Major Branscombe, would it be asking too much for you to accompany me to where Lieutenant Latimer is, that I may ask him what it means?"

"I will go with pleasure, Lonsdale, for these ugly rumors should be stamped upon at once," and all arose and followed the two officers from the supper room.

In the card-room there were two-score of gentlemen, wearing both the military and naval uniforms, and besides a number of the rich young civilians of the town.

Lieutenant Louis Latimer was a man of forty, with a face that wore a constant sneer, and it was well known that he disliked all officers who were his seniors in rank and junior in years.

He had been next in rank to Lieutenant Frank Fenton, on the *Ill Omen* in her cruise, and was on board the new frigate to which he had been sent that day.

As he saw Lionel Lonsdale approaching, he bowed coldly, and half turned away; but the young captain said, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all in the room, and his clear tones commanded immediate silence:

"Lieutenant Latimer, it has just come to my ears that a lie is going the rounds regarding me, and I have determined to at once brand the rumors floating about by appealing to you."

"To what do you refer, Captain Lonsdale?" and the officer slightly changed color.

"It is said that there was a mutiny on board my vessel, which was quelled by Lieutenant Fenton."

"Did I not quell that mutiny, sir, without an appeal to Lieutenant Fenton, yourself or any other officer?"

"You did, sir."

"Thank you; but it is also said that the crew would have brought the frigate back to port, but for Lieutenant Fenton, and also would have refused to fight the *Leviathan*, had not it been urged for them to do so by my first officer."

"Are not both these statements false?"

"They are, sir."

"Thank you," and amid the cheers that followed the words, Lionel Lonsdale walked away, followed by his immediate companions.

"Lonsdale, Latimer exonerated you fully, before all who heard him; but I am sure that he knows from whence the rumors sprung, as his face seemed to show a dread of further questioning."

"But you have nailed the lie to the mast, so that ends it; but tell me, will you command the *Saturn*?"

"No, for I still command the *Ill Omen*, Major Branscombe."

"But she was stripped of her crew to-day, and I hear not a man can be gotten to sail upon her."

"Still I shall command her, and Lieutenant Fenton now has charge of the *Saturn*."

The major gave a low whistle, and the others shook their heads, while one of those present said:

"That is what it is worth to be an admiral's son."

Lionel Lonsdale made no reply, and supper was just then brought in.

After enjoying the midnight repast the party went into the general assembly-room, just as Frank Fenton entered, having just escorted his father home, and then sought his usual rendezvous, Military Hall.

A number greeted him boisterously, for he was one to spend his money freely, and when he was not liked he was feared as a "power behind the throne," and those who wished to curry favor with the admiral sought to do so through his son.

Walking up to him quickly, and not seeing Lionel Lonsdale and his party, Lieutenant Latimer said a few words in a low voice.

The face of Frank Fenton flushed, and, as he moved on he caught sight of Captain Lonsdale.

The excellent port of the commodore had warmed his blood, and he recalled the words of the young captain as he left Vernon Hall, so he strode quickly toward him and said:

"Captain Lonsdale, as you are no longer my commander, sir, I desire to ask you if you meant to draw a comparison between your negro servant and myself, in your impudent response to my father's remark to you?"

All heard the angry words, and saw the insolent manner of the young lieutenant, and a perfect stillness fell upon those present.

"Lieutenant Fenton, I meant no comparison between you and my negro servant, Brandywine."

All breathed more freely, and Frank Fenton's face brightened, for he felt that he had gained a victory; but he was too quick in his opinion, as the words followed quietly, but distinctly:

"I regard my servant too highly, sir, to make such a comparison."

Every one present drew a long breath, and for an instant Frank Fenton seemed stunned; but he quickly recovered, and raising his glove, which he held in his hand, he said, savagely:

"This to me! Take that, sir!"

It was his intention to strike Lionel Lonsdale in the face with his glove; but ere he could do so it was snatched from his hand and thrown in his own face, with the quick remark:

"You, take that, sir!"

CHAPTER X.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

So completely had the tables been turned upon Frank Fenton, that he felt that he appeared in an awkward light.

He had come to Military Hall hoping to find there Lionel Lonsdale, and if so, to resent his words to the admiral, and which had cast a terrible slur upon him, in the remark that Brandywine was filling the place on board the Fatal Frigate which he had held as first officer.

"I will call him out, admiral, draw blood, and give him his life, for I can do it, and if he is wounded, you know, the *Saturn* cannot be delayed from putting to sea until his recovery, so you will have to make me her commander," had said Frank Fenton, as the carriage of the old admiral rolled home from Vernon Hall.

"Well, Frank, I know your skill, and it would be well to clip that fellow's spurs," responded the admiral.

Thus it was that the lieutenant had gone to the Military Hall, and, having been hurriedly told by Lieutenant Latimer what he had been asked to say openly by Lionel Lonsdale, it had but enraged him, for he could have told, had he wished so to do, from whence had been the starting-point of the rumors against the captain of the *Ill Omen* and in his favor.

A glance showed him that most of his intimates were present, and so he walked up to Lionel Lonsdale to take issue at once on the remark the young captain had made to the admiral.

How badly it terminated for him, the reader has seen, and assured that physically he was no match for Lionel Lonsdale, for he had seen an exhibition on board ship, of that gentleman's marvelous strength, he dared not strike him as he was tempted to do.

So he turned with face as white as a corpse, and a voice that quivered with intense fury, to Lieutenant Latimer, and said:

"Latimer, will you come with me please, for

I desire you to carry a message for me to Captain Lonsdale?"

The lieutenant bowed and the two walked off together, while Lionel Lonsdale turned to Major Branscombe and remarked:

"Go on board with me to-night, Branscombe, for I can take good care of you, and Brandywine will give us an excellent breakfast."

"With pleasure, Lonsdale, for I have a curiosity to see that old haunted craft; but Fenton intends you shall hear from him, you know."

"Certainly, and he will find me on board my vessel to-morrow, if he has any communication to send," was the answer, and the two friends left the Hall and wended their way down toward the harbor.

"Ahoy the *Ill-Omen!*" called out Lionel Lonsdale sharply, and the answer came promptly:

"Ay, ay, sir! Coming."

In a few moments a boat approached the pier, and in it was a single oarsman.

"Get in, major," said Captain Lonsdale, and as he took a seat alongside of the soldier, he asked the oarsman:

"Any ghosts been prowling around the old ship to-night, Brandywine?"

"I've seen the lady in white, massa, and heerd strange sounds on the old craft," was the answer.

"You saw the Lady Ghost then, Brandywine?" repeated Lonsdale with considerable interest.

"Yes, sir, I seen her and no mistake. She came out of the cabin, while I was on deck, walked forward, turned and went back into the cabin, sah, and I didn't go below any mo', because I waited for you, massa."

"This is a weird story to have a guest hear, major; but I'll vouch for it that Brandywine tells the truth, for I too have seen this strange, white-robed form."

"Still she seems harmless; but hark!"

They were now within half a cabin's length of the Fatal Frigate, and over the waters came the hail in a clear, feminine voice:

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that?"

"The *Ill Omen*," frankly answered the young captain.

"Ay ay. Come alongside," was the response.

"That's the ghost, massa," whispered Brandywine.

"So I saw, and heard, Brandy; but what do you think of that, major?"

"Heaven knows! and more, I would not board that craft with any other man living than you, Lonsdale, and yet, I am no coward," the major earnestly declared.

"And I am as free from superstition as any man, Major Branscombe, bu' that woman in white who haunts the ship is beyond my ken," said Lonsdale.

They had now reached the side of the ship, and the two young officers and Brandywine went over the side, and the gig was hauled up to the davits.

The negro, a giant almost in size, yet as active as an Indian, followed close on the heels of his master into the cabin, for he seemed not to like to remain on deck alone, though the "ghost" was nowhere to be seen.

The large and handsome cabin, luxuriously furnished and brilliantly lighted made Major Branscombe feel more cheerful, and he threw himself into an easy-chair, while Brandywine set out wine for them.

Suddenly there was heard the sound of oars, through the open stern-port, and immediately after came a hail from the deck:

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that?"

"It is the ghost hailing," whispered Branscombe.

"Listen for the answer," said Lonsdale, and immediately came the response:

"Ahoy the frigate!"

"What boat is that?" was heard from the deck again in the same clear, feminine voice.

"A shore boat, with a message to Captain Lonsdale."

"That is Latimer's voice," Lonsdale decided.

"Put back and come to-morrow," was the peremptory order.

"It is the Woman in White, that haunts the Fatal Frigate!" cried a voice in the boat.

"Pull for your lives!" came the stern order from some one in the boat, and away it went shoreward, to soon disappear in the darkness.

The major laughed in spite of the presence on deck of the dreaded specter, and said:

"Well, you'll get no challenge to-night, Lonsdale, thanks to the Weird Lady."

"It will come with the sunlight; but I am willing, for Fenton was determined to force this meeting upon me, and the sooner it is over the better" was the reply of the young captain.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHALLENGE.

WHEN the sun arose the following morning, the frigate *Ill Omen* rode quietly at her anchor, while a number of workmen were engaged upon her decks and in her rigging, for Captain Lonsdale was carrying out his intention of having her fitted out at his own expense.

The several guns which the young captain had

selected from the French frigate, had been put in place the day before, and those not needed had been sent ashore.

The magazine had also been well stocked from the prize, while the armory had been supplied with a complete outfit of small-arms.

There was nothing then to do but to fit the frigate out as to spars, sails, repairs and paint, and this was being done by a large force of workmen.

The hammering of nails and sawing of wood, aroused Lionel Lonsdale and his guest at an early hour, and they at once arose.

Brandywine had a good breakfast awaiting them, and under the sunlight there was no sign of the Woman in White.

As they were finishing their breakfast, Major Branscombe glanced out of the stern-ports and said:

"There comes Latimer, and he has no reason to fear the ghost in daylight."

"Brandy, hail that boat," called out Lonsdale, and going on deck the negro hailed sharply:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy! I wish to come on board to see Captain Lonsdale," answered Lieutenant Latimer.

"Keep off, until I see if Captain Lonsdale will see you," responded Brandywine.

"What nonsense is this?"

"I will at once come on board."

"Give way, men!" cried the irate lieutenant.

"Brandy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Train that small deck gun upon that boat, and sink her if he attempts to board!" cried Captain Lonsdale from the cabin.

The negro sprung to the small pivot on the stern, mounted so as to command the vessel and all around it, and his deep voice rung out:

"Keep off, or I'll fire into you."

"Wait until I ask if Captain Lonsdale will see you!"

A muttered curse came from the lieutenant, but he had no need to tell the men to cease rowing, as they had instinctively done so at the threat of the negro.

"Will you see him, massa?" asked Brandywine, coming into the cabin where Captain Lonsdale and the major were both laughing at the discomfiture of Lieutenant Latimer.

"Yes, Brandy, ask him into my cabin."

This little episode had caused the numerous workmen on board the frigate to cease work, and they rather enjoyed the situation.

"Ahoy, the boat! come alongside," called out Brandywine as he went on deck.

"My master will see you, sir."

"I will take you to his cabin," and the negro saluted politely.

"And I will wring your neck, you black dog," savagely said the lieutenant, who was white with rage.

"I obeyed orders, sir, so wring my master's neck!" and he called out:

"Lieutenant Latimer, sir."

"Good-morning, Lieutenant Latimer; but have you breakfasted?" said Lonsdale, politely.

"I have not, thank you; but I am engaged to breakfast with my friend Fenton; but what means the manner of my reception here, Captain Lonsdale?"

"It means, sir, that having been robbed of my men, Brandywine is acting as officer of the deck, crew and all, and it is my pleasure to hail any boat that comes off to me, for this is my vessel."

"And that mummery last night, of a pretended ghost hailing?"

"You know as much about that ghost as I do, sir, for my boat was hailed in the same manner, Lieutenant Latimer."

"It is the Woman in White the men said they saw at sea, and who haunts this frigate."

"And you will remain in such a craft?"

"Certainly; but was your visit one of pleasure or business?"

Lieutenant Latimer took the hint, and said:

"I come from my friend, Lieutenant Fenton, to demand that you meet him sir, in an affair of honor."

"Ah, yes, with pleasure; so please arrange with my friend, Major Branscombe, all the little details of the affair, and I will ask you to excuse me."

Bowing low, Lionel Lonsdale went on deck, and at once became as interested in the work of the men as though he had not an affair of life and death on hand.

He was having new topmasts set, with much more height to them than the old ones, and adding spars of greater length, so that far more canvas could be spread.

He had noticed that the frigate had carried all of her sail in half a gale, and stood up splendidly under the pressure, and he decided to add fully a third more of canvas to her, lengthening topmasts, spars, and bowsprit, and the promise of double pay made the men work like beavers.

So interested was he in the work that he forgot all about his visitor, who went over the side into his boat without his seeing him depart.

"Well, Lonsdale, all is arranged," said Major Branscombe, approaching him.

"Ah, major, it is not very complimentary to say so, but I had forgotten about Latimer. But

am I not having the frigate put in splendid trim?"

"You are, indeed, and she is really a magnificent vessel, now I come to see her, whereas it is the general impression that she is a tub."

"There is not a faster craft afloat of her size, nor a better sea-boat."

"In two days I will get her into the dock for scraping and painting, and when she goes to sea, which she will do soon, there will not be a finer vessel in the king's navy."

"But her crew, Lonsdale, her crew?"

"I will get a crew, and a good one," was the response, and then the young captain added:

"How would you like to board the French frigate with me, for I am going to send back some things from the cabin, which will add to my comfort, and then I shall transfer her as a prize to the port captain."

"But the challenge from Fenton, Lonsdale?" said the major, with a smile.

"True; I had forgotten it," and he led the way into his cabin.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEETING.

"WELL, major?" said Lionel Lonsdale, as the two entered the frigate's cabin together.

"He challenged you to fight him with whatever you liked in the way of weapons, though Latimer hinted as a matter of course that swords were the only arms that gentlemen should use in a duel."

"I care not what are used, though I prefer swords, as I do not wish to have to kill him."

"It was agreed that the weapons should be swords, and the time three days hence, as you requested."

"Latimer demanded an earlier day for the meeting, but I was firm, and he had to consent to it."

"It is better so, for my vessel will be ready to sail then, and I do not care to have to appear in public after the meeting, to answer numerous curious questions."

"You seem assured of success, Lonsdale, and I am glad you are confident," said the major.

"Why should I not be, when I know myself and gauge Fenton by others that I have met?" was the significant reply.

"But come, let us board the French frigate, and as soon as I have transferred her to the port captain I will see if I cannot, by the use of a little gold, get the Ill Omen into the dock to-day."

Calling to Brandywine to lower the gig, and leaving the workmen in charge, the captain and his guest rowed on board the Le Roi.

The French captain had been slain, but his officers were confined in the cabin, the men in the hold, and a guard from the fort were in charge.

Sending a young officer ashore for the port captain, Lonsdale selected what he desired for his own vessel from the handsome cabin of the French frigate, and sent them to the Ill Omen by Brandywine in the gig.

The port captain soon arrived, and the prize was transferred to his keeping, greatly to his delight, and the prisoners were sent on shore.

The offer of a little extra gold soon got the dock ready for the Ill Omen, and she was hauled in at once and work was begun upon her.

With the captain overlooking the work there were no idle hands, and on the third day, early in the afternoon, the Ill Omen was ready for sea, as far as the vessel went, and she created a great deal of admiration as she lay at her anchor in the harbor, though there was a feeling of dread also felt in gazing upon her.

It had now become known to all that Captain Lonsdale and his negro servant were alone upon the vessel, and also that he intended to go to sea very soon.

Seamen were too scarce in that port then to admit of it as a possibility that a crew could be secured, and some hinted that commanding the weird and fatal craft had turned the mind of the gallant young captain.

There not having been a duel between Frank Fenton and Lionel Lonsdale after the scene at the Hall, many supposed that the affair had been settled amicably; but still Lonsdale had never appeared at the place since that evening, and, when questioned upon the subject, Major Branscombe had nothing to say.

It was growing toward sunset, and Lionel Lonsdale was pacing the deck of the Ill Omen from stem to stern, and admiring her greatly, it was evident, from the manner in which his eyes rested upon the noble vessel from deck to truck.

She was in perfect condition, and all she needed was a crew, for Brandywine alone acted still in that capacity.

Suddenly a boat was seen coming out from the shore.

It was manned by two oarsmen, and three officers in uniform were in the stern.

The boat was heading for the frigate, and was soon alongside, Lionel Lonsdale recognizing his visitors and meeting them at the gangway.

They were Major Branscombe, of the King's Dragoons, Surgeon Dunlap of his regiment, and Captain Ford of the artillery, who had come at the request of the major as a witness.

All of the officers admired the ship greatly, though with the expressed determination that they would never sail in her, and especially were they of this opinion when Lionel Lonsdale told of the Lady in White who had been seen on the deck at night.

Brandywine was called to and brought refreshments for the guests, and then the party returned to the boat, Lonsdale accompanying them, and the negro was left in full charge.

"Allow no one on board, Brandy," called out the captain.

"No, massa, for if the gun don't keep 'em off, the Lady Ghost will," was the response.

The boat was headed toward a point of land a mile distant, and which was overgrown with cedars.

Arriving there, they saw a carriage coming down the driveway, and Major Branscombe said:

"There they come now."

A moment after the carriage drove up, and four persons alighted.

One of them was Frank Fenton, another was the surgeon newly appointed to the Saturn, the third was Lieutenant Latimer, and upon the fourth the eyes of the Lonsdale party turned with surprise.

"It is the admiral," quietly said Lionel Lonsdale.

"Yes, he has left off his uniform, and has only come to disconcert you, captain," assured the major.

Lonsdale smiled, and saluted the admiral with all respect as he approached, a salute the old gentleman returned stiffly.

Both swords and pistols had been brought, as the seconds had thought best, and the weapons were quickly laid out upon the grass, while Major Branscombe and Lieutenant Latimer conferred together.

The two surgeons had also saluted each other politely, and placed their ominous-looking instruments out ready for use.

Frank Latimer stood apart, laughing and chatting with the admiral, who, however, did not seem to be as light-hearted as was his son, his stern face wearing a look of anxiety, even though he knew that Frank Fenton had never met his equal with a sword, and already had vanquished several enemies in just such a meeting as that.

Standing where he could see the Fatal Frigate, Lionel Lonsdale was gazing upon her with pride, as though oblivious to all else except the beautiful vessel he commanded.

With his arms folded upon his breast, Captain Ford of the artillery closely watched the movements of all, an angry frown upon his brow at the thought of the admiral's presence, whom, as Major Branscombe had said, he was sure had come to unnerve Lonsdale by his presence, as his relationship to Frank Fenton and his high rank were calculated to do, for the officers present seemed impressed disagreeably by his being there.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUEL.

LIEUTENANT LATIMER and Major Branscombe were not very long in arranging the preliminaries, and then the duelists were called to their positions.

Lonsdale bowed and stepped to the place assigned him without a word.

Frank Fenton made some laughing remark to his father, then gravely saluted the admiral, and walked briskly to his position.

Captain Lonsdale bowed as he approached, but the lieutenant took no notice of it, which called forth from Major Branscombe the sharp remark to Lieutenant Latimer:

"Unless my principal is going to meet a gentleman, Lieutenant Latimer, I decline to have this affair go on."

"Captain Lonsdale saluted Lieutenant Fenton, and no notice was taken of it."

"Zounds!" muttered the admiral from his position ten paces away.

"The boy made a mistake."

Quickly brought to account for his rudeness, Frank Fenton was quick to make amends, for he said frankly: "I beg pardon, Captain Lonsdale."

"I was wrong to forget what was your due."

This was a victory gained for Major Branscombe, and Lionel Lonsdale bowed low in response, but did not speak.

The swords were then placed in their hands, the seconds took their stands, the word was given and the blades crossed with an angry ring.

The look of perfect confidence—nay, of utter indifference, upon the face of Frank Fenton, as he faced his adversary, faded ere half a dozen passes had been made.

He had perfect confidence in himself, but somehow he was confronted by a man who handled a sword with marvelous skill.

No one present had ever seen Captain Lonsdale use a blade, except on board ship, and Major Branscombe had been a trifle anxious, for he knew what a superb swordsman Lieutenant Fenton was.

Then, too, he feared the presence of the admiral might unnerve Lonsdale.

The Fatal Frigate.

But the dread faded from his countenance when he saw that unmoved face of Lionel Lonsdale, and the masterly handling of his sword.

Neither that he knew he faced the best swordsman in America, or the presence of Admiral Fenton, seemed to have the slightest effect upon Lionel Lonsdale.

"Zounds!" cried the admiral forgetting his intention of remaining at a distance, and coming rapidly nearer.

"Zounds! such swordsmanship I never before beheld."

Nor had the others present, and all were deeply interested in the fierce combat.

The confident smile was wholly gone from the face of Frank Fenton, and from acting on the offensive, he had suddenly been forced to fight upon the defensive.

Major Branscombe seemed to have caught the confident smile of Lieutenant Fenton, for he saw that Lonsdale was cool, handled his sword with strength and skill and was forcing his adversary back, while at the same time he made him fight wholly on the defensive.

Lieutenant Latimer had become pale, and the two surgeons looked on with deepest interest, while Captain Ford smiled complacently as he muttered:

"Fenton has met his match."

Nearer and nearer drew the admiral, now all excitement and deathly pale, for he felt that both he and his son had forced the duel upon Lonsdale, and his son's life was in deadly peril.

That Fenton was tired out all could see, while on the other hand, it seemed but exercise for Lionel Lonsdale.

Suddenly, as though anxious to stop the strain upon the nerves of all, Lonsdale by a most skillful movement, twisted his adversary's sword from his hand, and had him in his power.

All turned deathly pale, but the weapon point was lowered quickly, and Lionel Lonsdale said:

"On account of the presence of your father, Lieutenant Fenton, I give you your life, though you deserve no mercy from me."

"Zounds! God bless him!" cried the admiral, while sharp rung out the response of the defeated man:

"I ask no mercy from you, Captain Lonsdale, and I demand a meeting now with pistols."

"As you please, sir."

"Major Branscombe kindly gratify this gentleman," was the calm response, and Lionel turned away.

The second challenge, and the reply fell like a thunderbolt upon all.

The admiral frowned his displeasure at his son, and all seemed to feel that Lieutenant Fenton was going too far.

Lieutenant Latimer stepped forward and conversed a moment with his principal; but the result was not satisfactory to a settlement of the difficulty, except by another meeting and so he walked up to Major Branscombe, whose face showed his anger at the course taken by Lieutenant Fenton.

The admiral could say nothing, but it was clear that he was displeased with his son.

But Lieutenant Frank Fenton was in a rage, his pride had been lowered, for he had found his master with a sword, and that master his rival both in love and war.

He had thrown a second challenge in the teeth of Lionel Lonsdale, and it had been promptly accepted.

But Captain Ford thought he saw a way out of the difficulty, and he crossed rapidly over to Major Branscombe and whispered:

"As the challenged party Lonsdale has the choice of weapons, so let him take swords again, and Fenton will not fight."

"A good idea," and Major Branscombe went with the suggestion to Lionel Lonsdale, who replied:

"No, major, he demanded pistols, and I accepted, so let it be so."

The weapons were then taken from their boxes, loaded, and the distance of ten paces stepped off.

The face of Frank Fenton, though angry, had again assumed its look of confidence, for he knew well his deadly aim.

Still, when he faced Lonsdale there was something in the quiet, calm mien of his enemy that slightly disconcerted him.

The admiral now looked really distressed, for he knew that it would be hard for Lionel Lonsdale to again be impervious.

He gazed into the handsome face of the young captain with a pleading look, and earnestly tried to read there the fate of his son.

He knew well that his son was a dead shot, but the sword combat had caused him to lose confidence in a great degree.

Lieutenant Latimer had won the word, and he said, in terse tones, as though giving an order from the quarter-deck:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

Lonsdale bowed with his usual grace, while Lieutenant Fenton abruptly rejoined:

"I am."

"Fire!"

The pistol of Frank Fenton flashed at the word, but Lionel Lonsdale did not fall, as he had hoped, and all held their breath, for there was no limit to the time; this Latimer had insisted

upon, and Captain Lonsdale had his enemy at his mercy, if he was a dead-shot.

"Lieutenant Fenton, I took the chances of your fire to again give you your life."

"That you may feel that I do so, *see here!*"

As he spoke he tossed a guinea, which he held in his hand, up into the air, and firing quickly, the twang of the bullet striking the gold, was heard by all.

The guinea fell some twenty paces away, and picking it up, Major Branscombe said, as he gazed at the bent coin:

"I shall keep this as a souvenir of your marvelous aim, Lonsdale, with your permission."

"Certainly, major," and Lionel Lonsdale turned away, for not a word had come from Frank Fenton, who stood like one dazed.

"You owe that gentleman your life, sir," rung out the stern voice of the admiral, as he stepped up to his son.

"Ah, yes, pardon me, Captain Lonsdale, and accept my gratitude," said the young lieutenant coldly.

"Pray do not mention it, Lieutenant Fenton; while, if it will be any satisfaction to you, let me tell you that your bullet was well aimed, for I am wounded."

"Surgeon Dunlap, will you take a look at my arm, please?" and with a coldness that was marked, Lonsdale drew off his coat, when it was seen that his left arm was stained with blood.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ADMIRAL'S PLEDGE.

THE bullet from the pistol of Lieutenant Fenton had been well aimed, for it had been on a line with his enemy's heart, and had cut a gash in the arm just above the elbow.

"It is but a trifle," said Lonsdale, as Surgeon Dunlap dressed it.

"It was well meant for the heart, but will give you no trouble, sir," the surgeon replied.

"It was wonderful, after receiving that wound, Lonsdale, that your aim was so true," remarked Captain Ford.

"It is wonderful, sir, that with that wound you were a second time merciful."

"Permit me to tender you a father's gratitude for a son's life," and the old admiral raised his hat politely, while his voice quivered.

Frank Fenton had already gone toward the carriage, with Lieutenant Latimer, the surgeon following them, while the old admiral had stood a moment, struggling with himself as to his duty.

Then his sense of justice had triumphed, and he had stepped forward and said what he did, his face flushing as he did so, for Admiral Fenton felt his humiliation deeply.

"My dear sir, I beg you to feel that you owe me no gratitude, for I spared the life of Lieutenant Fenton because I am not one to ruthlessly take human life."

"Whatever your motive, sir, my gratitude remains the same."

"I bid you good-night, sir," and again raising his hat the admiral strode away with his usual pompous manner considerably toned down.

"Zounds, gentlemen, a wonderful swordsman, a marvelous shot, a strange man," he said as he entered the carriage, and was followed by the others.

Frank Fenton made no reply, while Lieutenant Latimer said in an obsequious tone:

"He but had more endurance than Lieutenant Fenton, sir, and tired him out."

"Zounds, sir, where were your eyes?"

"He played with you, my son, from the start."

Frank Fenton bit his lips and remained silent.

But Lieutenant Latimer was anxious to curry favor with the man who was to be his captain, so returned to the charge with:

"The lieutenant's bullet was well aimed, admiral."

"And the captain's bullet, sir, was better aimed, for I never saw such a shot—zounds! sir, never."

"Lieutenant Latimer was squelched and volunteered nothing more."

It was twilight when the carriage drew up at the handsome home of the admiral, and the father and son alighted.

Frank Fenton was still silent, bowed simply to his second and surgeon, at the same time telling the coachman to drive them where they wished to go, and then followed the admiral into the house.

The lamps were lighted in the old sailor's favorite sitting-room, and when Frank entered, he was pacing to and fro with a quarter-deck step.

The young man knew his father so well that he was sure of a scene, so he quietly took a chair and said nothing.

At length the admiral halted near him and said:

"My boy, your pride has had a fall."

"Is that any reason for reminding me of it, sir?"

"Well, no, but I was as sure as you were, that you did not have your equal with pistol or blade, and now I have seen your master with both. I can understand just how he quelled that mutiny, and more, how it was that he defeated the French frigate, for he is a wonderful person."

"You seem to think most highly, sir, of the

man who has humiliated your son," sneered the young officer.

"Egad, but I do, and I cannot help it, for he gave you your life twice, and once after you had drawn his blood."

"I would have fought him again, had I not thought that you and the seconds would have refused to permit it," said Frank Fenton sulkily.

"And rightly you thought so, for I would have stopped it right there, for the third time you faced that man he would have shot you through the heart."

"Do you understand, sir, shot you through the heart, for though you are quick with your aim, he is quicker, and more deadly, and because he did not kill you, he shall have the new frigate. I so pledge my word."

"Father!" and the young man was upon his feet in a rage.

"Silence, sir! I mean what I say, for I shall show my gratitude, and give him the Saturn; so leave me, sir, until you are in a better mood to understand what gratitude is."

Frank Fenton knew what his father was when he was aroused, and bowing in silence he left the room, and, determined to put a bold front upon his defeat, he went to the Military Hall for supper.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAJOR'S PROMISE.

WHEN the carriage had driven away, bearing the other party, the friends of Lionel Lonsdale indulged in conversation regarding the conduct of Frank Fenton, and the really generous manner of the old admiral, which no one had expected of him.

"Fenton took his defeat as badly as could be," said Captain Ford.

"He was as morose and disagreeable as I expected the admiral to be," the surgeon remarked.

"Well, he knows, and so do the others, that you spared Fenton from purely humane motives Lonsdale, and you certainly have more patience than I have."

"But what a superb swordsman you are, and as for a shot, I never saw the one you made equaled," and Major Branscombe was quite enthusiastic.

"I have practiced all my life with both firearms and blades, and know that my hand, eye and nerve will not fail me," was the modest reply.

The wound was now dressed, and the party wended their way to the boat, for it began to threaten rain.

Telling Major Branscombe that he would go with him to the Hall, if he would remain to supper aboard ship with him, the other officers having engagements to prevent, or as the major said laughingly, being afraid to go on board the fatal craft, Lonsdale was left there with the young soldier, while the boat with the others pulled ashore.

"Come, Brandy, we wish supper as soon as you can give it to us," said the captain.

"Be ready in few minutes, sir," answered Brandy, and the officers descended to the cabin, just as the lights from the city began to glimmer forth and large drops of rain to fall.

"I have to thank you, Branscombe, for your great kindness, and the able manner in which you conducted the affair."

"Let me drink your very good health and prosperity, and then I have a favor to ask of you."

The toast was drank with a will, and then as the two friends sat waiting for Brandy to give them supper, Lonsdale said:

"The favor I have to ask of you, major, is that you will have the kindness to make known to Commodore Vernon and his daughter, just how that affair terminated."

The major started slightly, turned his head half-away, and then said:

"Certainly, Lonsdale, I will do so."

"I ask this because I have a reason for believing that a garbled statement will reach her ears, such as, for instance, the report of the meeting on board the Ill Omen being quelled by Fenton, and the men going into action at his order and not mine."

"I understand, and I can well know that some enthusiastic friends of Fenton's set that rumor afloat."

"But you forced Latimer to stamp it as false, and no one can go behind that."

"Still I will do as you ask with the Commodore and Miss Vernon, and to-night, as I intend going thither."

"It will be a favor to me to do so."

"I'll set it right, rest assured: but Lonsdale?"

"Yes, major?"

The major looked confused; then he said, abruptly:

"Will you answer me a question, when I tell you it is not from idle curiosity I ask it?"

"Certainly."

"Are you engaged to Miss Vernon?"

"By no means."

"Your asking what you did led me to think so."

"No, I admire Miss Vernon very much, and I desire to retain the respect of both her father

and herself, and so I asked you what I did, fearing that the truth might not reach them.

"Not that I care for the story of the unpleasant affair, to be told as it was, in detail, only I do not care to have it said that Lieutenant Fenton gave me my life," and the young captain smiled.

"This gold coin will tell the story," and Major Branscombe took it from his pocket and looked at it earnestly, while he continued:

"I shall always retain this, Lonsdale."

Brandywine now came in with supper, which the two officers ate with evident relish, and soon after the negro had the gig alongside to row them ashore.

It was now very dark and raining, and Lionel Lonsdale enveloped himself in his storm suit and gave the major another to wear.

"You remain on board, Brandy," said the captain, as he took the oars.

"Yes, sir," responded the negro without the slightest hesitation.

"That is as plucky a fellow as I ever met, Lonsdale, for I'm deuced if I would stay on that old haunted craft all alone," said the major with a shudder.

"Brandy isn't afraid of the ghosts."

"No, Brandywine comes under the head of spirits himself," responded the major with a chuckle at his joke on the negro's name.

Arriving at the shore the gig was tied to a pier and the friends walked rapidly to the quarters of the major, where Lonsdale bade him good-night.

"I'll see you later at the Hall, for I'll return early from the commodore's."

"Yes, I'll drop in to say good-by."

"Good-by?"

"Yes, for you know I go to sea soon," and Lionel Lonsdale passed on, while Major Branscombe muttered:

"Lonsdale is up to something, which he will not even confess to me."

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

TRUE to his promise, Major Branscombe went to visit Vernon Hall, as soon as he had put on his finest uniform and made his best toilet, for, though half the maidens in town were in love with him, he was more than half in love with Belle Vernon and wished to look his very best.

A handsome, splendid fellow he was, the pride of his regiment, noble hearted, brave as a lion and the very man to win a fair girl's heart.

Young as he was he had served in India, with his father, who was a general and a baronet, and about him hung the charm of that far Eastern land.

He had distinguished himself upon many battle-fields, was rich and rapidly gaining promotion, and with hundreds of titled English maidens who would be glad to win him, he had fallen in love with an American girl.

That is why he had stated as he did, when he was asked by Lionel Lonsdale to tell the Vernons the truth about his duel with Frank Fenton.

That is why, with a cold dread at his heart, he had asked Lionel Lonsdale if he was engaged to Belle Vernon.

He had never breathed his own love to her, and he had jealously watched the attention shown her by Frank Fenton, and heard with pain rumors of her being engaged to him.

Lionel Lonsdale had not stood in the light of a rival to him, although he could not but admit to himself that he seemed the man above all others that would win the fair maid's heart.

The major was a favorite with the commodore, and Belle also liked him very much, admiring him for his good traits especially.

So he received a cordial greeting at Vernon Hall when he was announced, and the maiden was very glad to be able to learn the truth of certain rumors that had been floating about the town, and which had come to her ears, regarding Captain Lonsdale.

So, as soon as she could get an opportunity to speak upon the subject, she said, in an indifferent kind of way:

"Major Branscombe, what are these rumors going the rounds about Captain Lonsdale and Lieutenant Fenton?"

"Yes, Branscombe, I have heard enough to make Fenton a hero and place Lonsdale in a bad light," the commodore said.

"I am glad you refer to my friend, Lonsdale, Miss Vernon, for it gives me an opportunity to speak of him as I wish."

"Regarding the rumors of the mutiny at sea having been quelled by Fenton, and the battle with the Frenchman having been won also through the admiral's son, I saw Lonsdale step up to Lieutenant Latimer in the Hall the other night and ask him if there was a word of truth in either."

"And his reply?" said Belle.

"He is the friend of Fenton, but with Lonsdale confronting him he had to admit that there was not a shadow of a reason for those rumors."

"I am glad to hear this," the commodore said.

"But when was this?"

"Four nights ago."

"Lonsdale was here that night to visit us, and left just as the admiral and his son arrived."

"Yes, father, and I told you what Seward said occurred, and I expected trouble would follow, as Lieutenant Fenton seemed much out of sorts that night," Belle said.

"He came to the Hall from your house, Miss Vernon, and sought an apology from Lonsdale.

"It was asked in a most insolent tone, and Fenton felt deeply cut by the reply, and sought to strike Lonsdale in the face with his glove."

"Indeed, then the matter has gone pretty far," the commodore remarked.

"Yes, sir; but Lonsdale was too quick for him, as he snatched the glove from Fenton's hand and threw it into his face."

"Ha! that meant a challenge from Fenton."

"It was promptly sent, sir, and I seconded Captain Lonsdale in the affair which took place this afternoon."

The young major saw Belle Vernon start and her face became very pale.

Twice she essayed to speak, but no word came from her lips, and she gave a sigh of relief as her father asked:

"And the result, Branscombe?"

"I am happy to say, sir, was not serious.

"But, as it was Lonsdale's wish not to be misrepresented in the affair, I will tell you all that occurred," and the major told the story of his going home to the frigate with Lionel Lonsdale, the hail of the Woman in White, the challenge brought by Lieutenant Latimer, and all as it had occurred.

"I sincerely hope that Lonsdale was not seriously wounded," said Belle in an indifferent manner that belied her looks.

"A mere flesh wound, Miss Vernon; but more nerve I never saw than he exhibited, and a better swordsman and shot does not live."

"He certainly was most merciful."

"Egad, he had the patience of Job with the fellow," said the commander.

"You say that he struck a guinea which he threw into the air, Major Branscombe?"

"Yes, Miss Vernon, and I have it here as a souvenir."

He handed over the gold coin as he spoke, and both the commodore and Belle regarded it with interest, while the latter said:

"Dared I ask it of you, Major Branscombe, I would beg for this coin as—as a souvenir of—of a wronged man's mercy, and—and of your generosity."

Her face flushed as she spoke, and her words were uttered with hesitation.

Major Branscombe was not the man to refuse a woman anything, and he said instantly:

"If you will allow me, Miss Vernon, I will have a hole drilled in the curve made by the bullet, attach it to a luck-chain I got in India, and give it to you to wear as a charm."

"I should be delighted and esteem it a rare gift, Major Branscombe," was the reply, and the commodore asked:

"What do you think of Lonsdale's going to sea in that weird old frigate, major?"

"He said only to-night he was going very soon."

"He has not a man on board, has he?"

"Only his negro servant, sir; but it is growing late and I have an engagement to meet him at Military Hall," and the soldier took his leave.

As he entered the hall he threw aside his storm cloak, for it was still raining, and just then saw Lionel Lonsdale enter.

"Ah, captain, I was looking for you, and I kept my promise and set you right."

"You are a good friend, Branscombe."

"I hope you found the commodore and Miss Vernon well?"

"Yes, and in spite of my brave resolve, not to part with that bullet-marked guinea, Miss Vernon asked for it, and so I promised to have it swung upon a luck-chain I have and give it to her."

"She asked for it?" and the eyes of Lionel Lonsdale flashed as he spoke.

"She did indeed, and so I gave it to her."

"Well, wear this as a souvenir of me, Branscombe," and the sailor slipped a massive ruby upon the small finger of his left hand.

"Why, Lonsdale, this is worth a fortune."

"It is in place of the gold coin; but now let us have a glass together, and then I will say good-by."

"You will insist upon saying good-by," said Major Branscombe, and he gazed with delight upon the splendid ring, as the two walked together to a table to get the glass of wine.

"It is because I sail soon, you know, Branscombe, and in the Fatal Frigate; but here is best health and success."

He dashed off the glass of wine, and grasping his friend's hand, said:

"You will excuse me now, for I have an engagement!"

"Good-by."

In a moment he was gone, and bowing to the many who greeted him cordially, for the story of the duel was known, he passed out of the Hall into the storm.

After sauntering around the rooms, Major Branscombe came upon Captain Ford and Sur-

geon Dunlap, and calling to another officer to join them, they sat down to a game of cards.

Thus an hour passed, when suddenly Lieutenant Latimer entered, and his startling announcement fell upon all like a shock, for he cried excitedly:

"Lieutenant Fenton, the Fatal Frigate has gone driving out to sea before the storm, with all sail set, and, as she flew by the Saturn at anchor a flash of lightning revealed to us Lionel Lonsdale and a large crew upon the decks!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CREW OF THE ILL OMEN.

At the time of which I write, there was in the seaport town where my romance opens, a large structure known among the citizens as "The Tombs."

It was however not a burial-place, but a prison, and in it there were those who had been consigned there for various reasons, from murder, highway robbery and house-breaking, to civil suits, debt, mutiny and men who had been impressed for sea service.

This structure was so very strong that few guards were needed, and about it was a wall of great height that could not be scaled.

The officer in charge was an old sea-captain who had lost one leg in battle, and was just the man to be over the wild and motley set of prisoners confined there, and who numbered over six hundred.

It was toward "The Tombs" that Lionel Lonsdale wended his way after parting with Major Branscombe at his quarters.

He took a street leading along the water's edge until he had left the ruins behind him and came in sight of the huge, gloomy old pile of stone that sheltered so much of misery.

It was situated upon a bold bluff, overlooking an arm of the harbor, and at the base of the hill was a small cabin, the abode of several hardy fishermen who supplied the market with fish.

Approaching the cabin door he knocked lightly, and it was immediately opened by a sturdy looking man in storm suit, who saluted politely when he saw who his visitor was.

"Well, Harpoon, are you ready?" asked Captain Lonsdale pleasantly.

"Yes, sir, the boys are in the boats."

"How many men did you get all told?"

"Thirty, sir, half of whom deserted from the Saturn to go with you, and if they had their way all her crew would follow your lead, sir."

"I am sorry men deserted from the Saturn to go with me, for not one of them can I take, Harpoon."

"They must go back at once, so as you know them tell them so at the last moment, for I will do nothing that can be placed against me."

"Certainly, sir, I never thought of that, and I'll tell the men one by one that they must go back."

"Yes, do so."

"I'll not do it all the same, and if you don't think there are any along it will be all right," muttered the old sailor as he hustled about in search of his storm hat.

"And up at the prison, Harpoon?"

"I got word from my brother, sir, and he has over three hundred men on his list who are, or have been sailors, sir, and some sixty are soldiers, or have been."

"This will give me a full crew, Harpoon, and the latter will answer for marines."

"Yes, sir, the Ill Omen will go to sea in splendid style, and a few weeks' practice will make the men good sailors and fighters under you, sir."

"Have you boats enough to take them on board?"

"Yes, sir, I have twenty-five fishing skiffs and yawls all together."

"They will do; but where are they?"

"In the cove, sir, as you directed I should have them."

"This is a good night for our work, Harpoon."

"It is indeed, sir, for nobody is astir in such a storm and you can run out to sea with the breeze abeam and fly by the forts unseen."

"I do not care if I am seen after I get my men on board, for I have a right to go to sea, and can signal, if fired on, that it is the Ill Omen bound on a cruise."

"I have not allowed a single officer to know my secret, for I wished to compromise no one."

"I was refused a crew by the admiral, but told to go to sea if I could man my vessel."

"As I felt the prison would give me the men I wanted, and many of them in there are unjustly held—for instance, your brother and son—I determined to get my crew from there, and with the aid of yourself and others I have been successful."

"Now, here is a little purse for you against old age, Harpoon."

"It is a thousand dollars, and is from my own prize-money, so do not refuse it."

"Captain Lonsdale, you saved me from a pirate craft once, when I would have been hanged but for your bold attack on her."

"In yonder prison I have a brother and son languishing, accused of killing an English officer in escaping from the Press Gang, who boarded

our little smack to take all on board and put them on English ships against their will.

"If I touched your gold, sir, it would be wrong; and though I thank you, sir, I must refuse it, for are you not giving liberty to my brother and boy—yes, and to hundreds of other brave fellows, even if they are called felons?" and the old fisherman spoke most warmly.

"And about the keeper and the guards?"

"The old captain will admit you, sir, knowing you to be an officer, and he is always alone in his office, and you will have to capture him, sir."

"I can do that; but the night guards are six in number, and stationed in various parts of the building, as I understand it?"

"Yes, sir; and they cannot get out of the building without coming through the captain's room, nor can they give any alarm that would be heard."

"It is an easy trick, sir, if you can catch the old captain cleverly, and I will have a dozen men in masks outside, to follow you in as soon as you have the captain a prisoner, and all of them, at one time or another, have been in the Tombs, and know it well."

"Once they are in, they will go to the cells in which my brother and son are and let them out, and then they can unlock the wards where those on their lists are, and then it is a march of only a few cable's-lengths to the boats, a pull of half a mile to the frigate, and you are ready for sea."

"The men do not know that it is the Fatal Frigate they are to ship on?"

"No, captain, no; for many of them would rather stay in prison than go on her."

"There is no one to tell them, unless you or your negro servant cares to do so, and all will go well."

"I will not deceive them; once I am out at sea they shall know what craft they have shipped on, and help me to prove that the frigate is not fatal to all who sail in her."

"But come, let us not delay, for after nine the old captain might refuse to open his doors."

And the captain and fisherman left the cabin together.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TOMBS.

UPON leaving the cabin of Harpoon, the young captain, as though familiar with the locality, led the way along a path that conducted the two down to the sandy shore of a small lake.

There was a shelter there, built to haul boats under, and beneath it were gathered a number of men in heavy storm suits.

A driving rain was falling, and the wind was blowing half a gale, so that the night was one well calculated for the secret work of Captain Lonsdale.

Upon the shore were over a score of boats of all sizes, and the men were awaiting with patience the movements of their commander.

As Harpoon was recognized, the men saluted the one with him, assuming that he must be their chief.

Calling a dozen men out from the party the old fisherman said something to them in a low tone, and they immediately followed Lionel Lonsdale, who was walking slowly up the hill.

The path he had taken led up to the gloomy old structure so well named The Tombs, and soon the party halted a hundred feet away from the little stone wing which formed the commandant's little office, and through which was the exit and entrance into the dismal prison.

The captain then advanced alone, and the light in the grated windows upon either side of the heavy, nail-studded door, showed that the one-legged commandant had not retired.

A knock on the iron knocker soon brought the query from within, through a narrow aperture opened in the door for the purpose:

"Who is there?"

"Good-evening, Captain Stone; I am Captain Lonsdale, and I come to visit you on a matter of vast importance."

"Ah! I'm glad of a visit from you, captain, and I want to thank you for capturing the French frigate, for a Frenchman shot my leg off, sir."

"I will let you in, sir; but are you alone?"

"No, sir, but my men can await outside."

The heavy bolts were shot back in the locks, the bar removed, and Captain Stone gave entrance to Captain Lonsdale.

"Won't you have your men come in, for you say you are not alone, sir?"

"No, captain, and my business with you must be hastily attended to."

"The truth is, Captain Stone, I am compelled to seem a little rough on you, for you are my prisoner, sir!"

Captain Stone afterward said, in telling the story, as he loved to do when he grew older and sat in his own chimney-corner:

"I never in my life was so surprised at what I heard."

"I at first thought the captain was joking; but there was his pistol looking me straight in the face, and I was not born a fool, so I obeyed orders, and nobody blamed me for it, either."

"Sit down in that chair, Captain Stone," said Lionel Lonsdale sternly.

The man obeyed.

"Now, captain," continued the sailor, "I mean you no harm whatever."

"I must tie you to your chair, for fear of accidents; but I will send word back to release you, as soon as I have accomplished what I desire."

"The fact is, my dear captain, our admiral has left me in command of the frigate Ill Omen, with facetious orders to go to sea when I wish; but he has taken my crew from me, and so I have to secure one."

"It is impossible to get a crew from New York to Portland, for there are no men I can ship; but your prison here has some splendid fellows, among them many innocent of the crimes for which they are placed here, while many more perhaps are guilty."

"Still, I cannot separate the chaff from the wheat just now, and I will save the Colonial Government a large expense, by taking the felons off their hands and putting them to good work."

"I hope I make myself quite clear, my dear Captain Stone?"

"Too infernal clear, sir, to suit me, for I'll be ruined," growled the keeper.

"Oh, no, for as an officer of the king you were compelled to open your prison door to me, and certainly, even for the king, you were not compelled to be shot when it would serve no good end."

"You are in my power, sir, and I will keep you bound, until I have my men safe on board ship."

"Then you shall be released, and no blame will be attached to you."

"Pardon me for binding you, and if you will promise not to speak, I will not gag you."

"Have I your promise, Captain Stone?"

"No, I'll speak out sure, so gag me, too," was the gruff response.

"I will, and you see I came ready," and the captain took a wooden gag from beneath his storm-coat.

The keeper was then securely gagged and bound in his chair, and stepping to the outer door, Captain Lonsdale gave a shrill whistle.

Instantly the men in waiting came into the room.

They were enveloped in storm-suits and wore masks, so that Captain Stone could not recognize one of them, though at different times he had had all of them under his keeping.

Taking the keys of the wards from the belt of the keeper, Captain Lonsdale said:

"Men, we will now release those who are to go with us."

"Two of you stand guard in this room, and under no circumstances allow any one to enter."

"If any one should come to the prison, pay no attention to his knocks."

Then Lionel Lonsdale unlocked the door leading into the prison corridor, and followed by all but two of the men, went under their guidance to the cells occupied by the brother and son of Old Harpoon the fisherman.

"This is old Manly's cell, sir, and the lad's is two beyond," said one of the men.

"All right; here are the keys," was the answer of Lionel Lonsdale, and a moment after two men stepped out of the cells referred to, the one a man of fifty, the other a youth of twenty.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RELEASE.

THE two who came out of the cells were Robert and Mark Manly, the brother and son of Old Harpoon, as Skipper Manly was known, rather than by his real name.

Robert Manly was a stern-faced man of fifty, every inch a sailor, and who, with his nephew, had been condemned to death for killing an English officer who had boarded his fishing-smack and attempted to impress them and the crew of four men for service on board a British man-of-war.

In two weeks more they were to die, so they naturally looked upon Lionel Lonsdale with admiration and gratitude.

By hiring a guard, who owed him many favors, Skipper Manly had sent letters to his brother and son, telling them the plan of Captain Lonsdale to fit out a frigate for a cruise, and asking them to find out just what material there was in the prison fit for such service.

Their response had been promptly given, and within a few days all were in readiness for their release, and not a traitor was feared among the lot, for to leave those gloomy walls was worth the risk of life at any time.

"You know the wards and the men, Manly?" said Captain Lonsdale, recognizing Robert Manly, who had been in the fishing-smack, as had also Mark, when the young captain had pounced down upon a pirate that had captured their fishing-smack, and meant to hang all on board because they would not guide him to the homes of some wealthy dwellers along the coast.

They had been released by Lionel Lonsdale, their smack returned to them, and before they had sailed far from his brig-of-war, had the satisfaction of seeing the pirate captain and his men swung up to the yard-arm.

It was no wonder then that in the three Manslys Lionel Lonsdale had found good friends.

"Yes, captain, the boy and myself know all of 'em, and we've got the pick of the jail, though I guess you could get all of 'em in it."

"I do not wish all, only those you have selected that I can make a good crew out of."

"Now go to the wards and call them out, for my men have already secured the half-dozen guards."

The fact was that the guards, one stationed in each corridor, were as much surprised as had been their commandant, and not one had offered resistance.

As the men filed out, Captain Lonsdale stood at the door of the assembly room, through which they had to pass, and motioned them to take position in line as they passed through.

Their faces were jubilant at their escape, and they obeyed in silence.

When all had passed in, the two Manslys bringing up the rear, Captain Lonsdale said:

"Men, I release you from prison to serve me on board ship."

"I go at once to sea on a special cruise, and there will, I hope, be ample prize-money for you all."

"The man who does not care to sail with me, let him say so, and I will return him to his cell."

"Are there any such?"

Not a man replied, and after waiting full a moment for any one to speak, Captain Lonsdale gave the order for the guard that had come with him to form upon either side the line, the Manslys to bring up the rear, and placing himself at the head of the column, he led the way.

The slow, solid tramp of the convicts resounded dismally through the gloomy prison, and, as they appeared in the office of the keeper, that worthy gave a groan.

"I leave you quite a number of charges, my dear captain, and when I get to sea I shall put you down on the list for your share of prize-money."

"Within the hour you will be relieved of your bonds, and I now relieve you of the gag."

"Good-night," said Lionel Lonsdale, after taking the gag from the captain's mouth, moved on once more.

As the men passed through, many of them bade the captain farewell, for he had been a kind-hearted keeper, and all he could do for them he had done.

"Good-by, lads, and if you don't win a name under that daring devil that has released you, I'll be disappointed."

"Good-luck to you, at least, and capture all the prizes you can, as I'm down on the list," he said with a laugh.

Out of the prison filed the long line, two by two, but once outside, they formed by fours, and marched at a quickstep after their bold leader.

The door was closed by Robert Manly, and the prison was left to its silence and gloom.

Quickly Old Harpoon embarked the men in the different boats, the oars being muffled, and getting into a gig with Captain Lonsdale, his brother and son, he seized the oars and led the way.

The rain beat fiercely down, the wind howled across the waters, and the darkness was intense.

Not a craft was seen moving in the harbor, and the watch on the different decks had shrunk to shelter from the pitiless rain.

Slowly, silently, in single file the boats rowed on, the little gig leading, and at last the dark hull of the Ill Omen was visible ahead.

"Boats ahoy!" suddenly rung out in a shrill voice from the Ill Omen.

"Ahoy the frigate! I am Lonsdale," called back the young captain, knowing that the hail came from the ghostly keeper of the vessel, and not wishing to mention the name of the Ill Omen before the crew, for fear of a general stampede of the boats.

"Ay, ay, come alongside," was the reply, in the same shrill voice.

"That is not the voice of your black, sir?" said Skipper Manly.

"No, it is another who stands watch for me," was the reply, and the gig touched the gangway.

Instantly Captain Lonsdale sprung on board, and Brandywine met him.

"That Lady in White has been walking the deck all night, and I've kept mighty dark, sir."

"You always do, Brandy; but do not speak of the ghost now, or we'll not have a man on board in five minutes."

The men now came over the side, and calling to Robert Manly, Lionel Lonsdale said:

"Mr. Manly, you will have to act now as my first officer, and those you know who would also make good officers please pick out for me."

"Let the men get all ready to haul up the anchor and set sail by my return, for I will be back within the hour," and going over the side into the gig, in which Old Harpoon still remained, Lionel Lonsdale said:

"You can dismiss your men now, skipper."

There was a man in every other boat, fishermen in the service of the old skipper, and at a word from Harpoon they started to pull back to the shore. Each boat towed another astern, and thus the crew of the silent flotilla, which had

The Fatal Frigate.

served Lionel Lonsdale so well, started back to replace their boats where they belonged, and thus destroy every trace of their participation in the bold midnight release of hundreds of convicts.

And the men in the boats went back well rewarded by the gallant young commander of the Ill Omen.

"Now, skipper, set me ashore at the pier nearest Military Hall, and I will not detain you long," said Lionel Lonsdale.

His visit to the Hall the reader has seen, as well as his farewell to Major Branscombe, who little dreamed what his friend had just accomplished.

Leaving the Hall he hastily made his way to the pier, sprung into Skipper Manly's waiting boat, and was soon on board the Ill Omen.

"Good-by, skipper, and here is the letter for you to leave at the door of the President of the City Board, that he may send up and release Captain Stone; but be careful not to let the one who comes to the door see your face."

"Trust me for that, sir; but good-by, and Heaven bless you, sir."

"Good-by, Bob, and you, my boy," and with a wring of the hand for each, the old skipper pulled away from the frigate, while out through the darkness rung in trumpet tones:

"All hands aho to set sail!"

The men who understood the order sprung to their posts, and a few minutes after the Fatal Frigate was under sail, her anchor up, and flying down the harbor toward the open sea.

Upon her drove the pelting rain, the winds howled through her rigging, while suddenly, as though in anger at the daring man who had shipped a convict crew upon a fated craft, a mass of storm-clouds swept over the heavens, and peals of thunder broke from them, while the vivid lightning played in fiery tongues about the ill-omened frigate as she flew seaward.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TIDINGS.

THE day following the flight of the Fatal Frigate, was one of intense excitement in the town and port.

Lieutenant Latimer had been on the Saturn's deck, called there by the sudden coming up during the pouring rain, of the thunder-storm.

The vessel had been hauled out to an anchorage; and, though not by any means ready for sea, as not a sail was bent on her, and there was much to do, her crew were on board—those who had been taken from the Ill Omen.

"See there, sir!"

The cry had come from a middy, whose bright eyes had sighted the Ill Omen coming down the harbor under sail.

"Great heavens! What does it mean?" cried the excited officer.

"It is the Fatal Frigate, sir," said the middy.

"You are right, and she has all her canvas set."

"Yes, sir; and see! the lightning reveals her decks filled with men!"

The seamen on board the Ill Omen were mostly dressed in their white, coarse prison uniforms, and seen about the decks and in the rigging they gave the strange craft a weird look, which caused an old quartermaster to say:

"Them is ghosts, sir, that man yonder craft, begin' yer pard'n', sir."

"They look it, indeed," muttered Lieutenant Latimer, and his gaze was riveted upon the stately vessel as she fairly flew by within two cable lengths of the Saturn.

The lightning was now incessantly vivid, and Lonsdale was recognized upon the quarter-deck, trumpet in hand, and Lieutenant Latimer said half aloud:

"I believe that man is a wizard, or kin to Satan, for how on earth did he get that crew?"

As the Fatal Frigate flew on, carrying a vast cloud of canvas for the heavy breeze that was blowing, and going like a race-horse, Latimer called to the next officer in command, and telling him that he was going ashore, ordered a crew into a boat and pulled rapidly away.

Landing, he hastened through the storm-swept streets to the Military Hall, in search of his commander, Frank Fenton, and seeing him, at once gave the startling news that the Ill Omen had gone to sea.

"Impossible!" cried the amazed lieutenant, and the word was echoed by a score more of voices.

"But, I saw her go by the Saturn, sir," insisted Latimer.

"She had not a man on board to man her, other than Lonsdale and the negro," declared Fenton.

"She went by with her decks crowded with men, sir, and they were all dressed in white."

"Then it was a crew of ghosts," said Frank Fenton, with a light laugh.

But, his words fell with a strange sensation upon those present, and no one joined in the laugh.

"Why, my dear sir, Captain Lonsdale was here with me not over half an hour ago," remarked Major Bert Branscombe, who had heard the startling report of Lieutenant Latimer.

"Yes, I saw him."

"That is so; he was here only a few moments ago," cried several voices.

"I walked to the door with him, for he said he had an engagement and he bade me good-by.

"It was just fifty minutes ago," added Major Branscombe, referring to his watch.

"Yet I saw him upon the quarter-deck of the Ill Omen, all the same," persisted Latimer.

"Did you come directly here from the Saturn, lieutenant?"

"Yes, Major Branscombe."

"Then it might be possible, for he would have had time to go on board and get sail up with a good crew. I remember now that he told me good-by, instead of good-night, and I referred to it at the time."

"But where did he get his crew?" urged Fenton.

This question no one could answer, and he asked quickly:

"No one has left the Saturn, Latimer?"

"Only the usual number of men allowed to go ashore each night, sir."

"How many?"

"About twenty, sir."

"Had they returned?"

"No, sir."

"Then he may have inveigled them to go with him?"

"No, Lieutenant Fenton, for I saw fully two hundred men on the deck of the Ill Omen, if not more."

"He has taken those men at least as part."

"I thought it was said the men from the Saturn would not sail under Captain Lonsdale, and especially on board the Fatal Frigate?"

"I have heard it right in these rooms, but set it down as false when it was said," and Major Branscombe spoke in a very pointed manner.

"He may have forced the men to go, sir," said Lieutenant Fenton.

"No crew could be forced by one man, Lieutenant Fenton, to go on board a haunted craft, right in the harbor with vessels all around them."

"If he has gone to sea, as Latimer states, he will get himself into trouble," said an officer.

"Is that so, Fenton?" several asked.

"I think the admiral will take decided steps in the matter," replied Frank Fenton.

"I think different, Lieutenant Fenton, for, as I understand it, Captain Lonsdale was ordered to the Ill Omen for an unlimited time and a cruise *ad libitum*.

"Your father ordered the crew from the vessel, after Lonsdale's gallant capture of the Le Roi, but that did not affect the captain, and he was told he could go to sea, as I understand it, whenever he could get a crew."

"In some mysterious way Lonsdale, who never does anything by halves, has gotten a crew and gone to sea, and my word for it, with a good ship and able men to man it, he will be heard of rendering good service for the king."

"Good-night, gentlemen," and Major Branscombe left Military Hall for his own quarters, deeply impressed with what had occurred.

Those he left behind him were equally as impressed, and the word went round that Lionel Lonsdale had defied fate in doing as he had done, gone to sea in a craft that had proven as ill-omened as her name.

"Come, Latimer, late as it is, we must go and report this to the admiral," said Lieutenant Fenton.

"Yes, Fenton, and you may have to sail in the Saturn to hunt down Lonsdale as a pirate."

It was Captain Ford of Branscombe Regiment who spoke, and Frank Fenton knew that it was meant as sarcasm; but he said, as he left the Hall:

"If the admiral gives me such orders, Captain Ford, I shall execute them."

"If you can," was the dragoon's rejoinder with a light laugh, for the duel of the afternoon was still fresh in his memory, and he had not expected it to terminate as it did, any more than bad Frank Fenton and the admiral.

With the morning sunrise the news of the Ill Omen's flight was all over town and as the true state of affairs became known, the excitement became intense.

CHAPTER XXI.

PIRATE OR CRUISER.

WHEN Frank Fenton and Lieutenant Latimer reached the admiral's home, the marine on duty at the door said that it would be impossible for them to pass in.

"Do you recognize me, sirrah?" hotly said Frank Fenton.

"Yes, lieutenant; but the admiral's orders were not to let him be disturbed until morning under any circumstances."

The son recalled his parting with his father, and knowing that the old admiral was mad clean through at that time, he concluded, even with the news he bore, he had better not disturb him.

So the two went on board the Saturn, and Lieutenant Fenton heard from the lips of all who had seen the Ill Omen fly by, just what had occurred.

Their stories all tallied with that of Lieutenant Latimer, and, as it was late the young commander of the Saturn decided to retire to his cabin.

"We will breakfast at seven, Latimer, and then go up to see the admiral," he said.

Promptly at seven the two met at breakfast, and afterward were set ashore at the foot of the street leading up to the admiral's home.

The Ill Omen was certainly not where she had been anchored the day before, and there was stealing into the mind of the young lieutenant, who was very superstitious, that Lonsdale had gone to sea with a spirit-crew.

"I only hope the admiral will not order me in chase, for I do not care to follow in the wake of such a craft," he said, and Latimer agreed with him perfectly.

Still, remembering his defeat at the hands of Lionel Lonsdale, Frank Fenton hoped that the admiral would find some way to brand him as a pirate.

"If the admiral does that," he mused, "then I will certainly command the Saturn, and with Lonsdale an outlaw the field will be clear for me to win Belle Vernon."

These thoughts however the young sailor kept to himself.

Arriving at the headquarters, they found the admiral had arisen and was at breakfast.

The guard was just being relieved, and so the news had not yet been made known, as the men on duty had of course held no conversation with the outer world.

Hearing who his visitors were the admiral had them brought right into his breakfast room.

He had had a good night's sleep, was in a fine humor, and greeted his son in a very cordial manner, giving his hand also to Latimer.

"Well, gentlemen, a bright morning after the terrific storm of last night," he said.

"Yes, sir, and our early call is to give you some startling tidings, admiral," said Frank Fenton, anxious to at once break the news.

"Indeed! were any of the vessels in the harbor struck by lightning, for the storm fairly startled me."

"It was pouring rain when I retired, and then I was awakened by terrific crashes of thunder and vivid lightning, as though these Yankee witches were abroad."

"They were abroad, father, for the Ill Omen went to sea."

"Ha! broke from her moorings and drove out to sea?"

"No, sir, she went under sail, in that thunder-storm, and many say that the witches helped her."

"Egad, they must have, for she had no crew on board, only Lonsdale and his servant."

"Yes, sir, she had a full crew, such as they were."

"Who says this?" and the admiral looked anxious.

"Lieutenant Latimer saw her drive by the Saturn with a full crew on board, dressed in white, and with more sail set than looked right for an honest craft to carry."

"You amaze me!"

"You saw this, Latimer?"

"Yes, sir, and at once went up to Military Hall and reported it to Lieutenant Fenton."

"And Lonsdale?"

"Was at the Hall an hour before, sir, taking a bottle of wine with Major Branscombe."

"I saw him there, though we were not in the same room," said Frank Fenton.

"And your crew, Frank?"

"Are all on board excepting about fifteen who did not turn up."

"Those fifteen could not man the frigate."

"No; and besides, Latimer said her decks held several hundred men."

"Then that brave fellow, Lonsdale, has, in some mysterious way, gotten a crew and gone to sea."

"That places you in command of the Saturn, Lieutenant Fenton."

"I thank you, sir; but has not Lonsdale done a lawless act?"

"In what way?"

"Going to sea as he has."

"He had no orders against it, my son."

"Still, this looks strange."

"He had command of the frigate, with unlimited orders, and my sanction to get a crew if he could."

"He has gotten one in some mysterious way, and that is the end of it."

"It was hinted at the Hall, last night, that his act was piratical," suggested Lieutenant Latimer.

"His act is no such thing, for he holds a commission in the king's navy and commands the frigate legitimately, so he goes out in her as a cruiser; but if he turns her into a pirate, that is another matter."

"Some think that he will do so."

"That remains to be seen; but I regret his going just now, as dispatches received last night by the Royal William indicate that there must be war soon with the colonies, and Lonsdale is an American and may side with them, while promotion and a fine ship might make him true to the king; but what is it, sir?" and the admiral turned to a servant who entered.

The Fatal Frigate.

"Captain Stone, sir, the Commandant of The Tombs, sir, and the President of the Town Council, wish to see you, sir."

"Ah! Ask them in," was the admiral's reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET OUT.

CAPTAIN STONE looked worried, and the President of the Town Council certainly was excited, for he showed it, as they were ushered into the room of the admiral.

The two young sailors had risen to depart, but the admiral detained them with the remark:

"They may bring some news of the Ill Omen's flight."

"My lord, I bring bad news," said Captain Stone, while the president echoed:

"Yes, Admiral Fenton, deuced bad news."

"Be seated, gentlemen, and then let me know what it is that you have to relate," said the admiral, calmly.

"Well, my lord, I lost four hundred of my prisoners last night," groaned Stone.

"Ha! the rumor was true, then, that the scourge had broken out in your prison?" and the admiral turned pale.

"There have been, sir, several cases of the scourge, sir, but we have checked it, I hope, sir, and I kept it secret, not to alarm the townspeople, my lord; but the scourge that took my prisoners last night was a pirate, sir."

"What?"

"Yes, sir, and I never would have thought it, sir."

"No, sir, I never would have thought it," echoed the president.

"In the king's name, what do you mean?" cried the admiral, impatiently.

"I mean, sir, that every sailor I had in my keeping, and some sixty soldiers, were taken from me last night."

The admiral bounded to his feet and cried:

"Who took them?"

"Captain Lionel Lonsdale, sir."

To the amazement of all, the admiral burst out into a roar of laughter.

Neither Captain Stone or the President of the Council thought it funny, nor did the two sailors see any joke in it either.

But the admiral laughed heartily, and then said:

"So Lonsdale robbed your prison to get a crew, Captain Stone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your convicts dress in white, I believe!"

"Yes, my lord, in the prison garb."

"There, Latimer, that accounts for the ghostly crew you saw upon the Ill Omen last night."

"Yes, my lord, he took the men for that haunted craft," said Captain Stone.

"A Haunted Frigate and a convict crew," mused the admiral.

"He will turn her into a pirate at once, my lord."

"No, Sir Commandant; Captain Lonsdale bears a king's commission, and he commands the Ill Omen legitimately."

"The men he had with him on his last cruise seemed to feel a hesitancy about sailing with him again, and certainly to going upon that Fatal Frigate, as she is called."

"So I sent the crew to the Saturn, leaving Captain Lonsdale and his negro servant in the Ill Omen, but with the understanding that if he could get a crew, he might do so."

"Now you tell me he has got one?"

"Yes, sir, of felons."

"Let me see, there were sailors that had been impressed in the prison, then some imprisoned for debt, unruly seamen and soldiers, and then convicts, such as murderers, burglars and highwaymen!"

"Yes, sir, and principally the latter, for the Colonies of late have been in a very dangerous condition," said the President of the Council.

"There were, of course, two-thirds of them sailors, and many of them as good seamen as could be found."

"But tell me, did he break into the prison?"

"No, sir."

"That is in his favor, but how did he manage it so cleverly?"

"He came to the prison, told me who he was, and I allowed him to come in, my lord, as he had a right to do."

"I saw that some men were with him, and invited him to ask them in out of the storm."

"But he declined in his polite way, and then covered me with a pistol, and said I was a prisoner."

"I saw that to resist was to die, so I did as he told me, and he quickly bound and gagged me."

Again the admiral laughed, and asked:

"Did he do this alone?"

"Yes, my lord, he did."

"What then?"

"He told me he desired to save expense to the Colonial Government by relieving me of some of my people, and calling to his men, they entered."

"There were twelve of them, all masked and in storm suits."

"Leaving two with me he took the keys and with the others went out into the corridor."

"Of course my six men on duty, one in each corridor, could offer no resistance, for they were taken, one by one, before they knew what it meant."

"No one was killed?"

"No, my lord."

"No blood shed?"

"No, my lord."

"Very well, sir, go on with your story, for it is intensely interesting," and the admiral seemed in the best of humors.

"After an absence of nearly an hour the captain returned, and marching in double-file behind him, were four hundred of my best men."

"He made a good selection, eh?"

"Yes, my lord, he took the best."

"And then?"

"He released me of the gag in my mouth, said he needed my men for a cruise, and bade me a polite good-by, saying he would send back soon to have me set free of my bonds."

"And he did so?"

"Well, my lord admiral," put in the president, "a man called at my door and aroused us with loud knocks, and when my servant went to see what it meant, he handed to him this note for me."

"You can read it, sir."

The admiral adjusted his glasses and read:

"You will find Captain Stone, Commandant of The Tombs, bound in his chair, and some four hundred of his prisoners missing. I having borrowed them for a cruise in the king's Ill Omen."

"When you receive this, I shall have sailed, so please send up and relieve the captain of his bonds."

"LIONEL LONSDALE,

"Captain Royal Navy."

"The man left, my lord, as soon as he left the note, and I was in a fright, as you can well understand."

"I went at once in my carriage up to The Tombs, and found the captain here bound as stated."

"He told me his story, and we then went through the prison to see who had been taken."

"It was easier to pick out who had been left, eh?" said the admiral.

"Yes, my lord, and, as soon as we felt that you would receive us, we came to report to you what the pirate had done."

"Gently, Mr. President, for Captain Lonsdale is a king's officer, and no pirate, though he certainly has raided The Tombs for a crew."

"But he can be punished, my lord."

"It is catching before hanging, Mr. President."

"He certainly has done a lawless act, sir."

"Well, it cannot be called a case of kidnapping, for the men went willingly, and he did not break into the prison, while it can hardly be termed robbery, as mankind are not looked upon as chattels."

"I tell you, gentlemen, Captain Lonsdale has done a very daring, a bold act, and he may repeat it, for he has placed himself in the power of hundreds of convicts, and they may turn the craft into a pirate, after murdering him."

"Zounds! he has not a single officer, and what he has done is wonderful for pluck."

"He has got his crew however, and gone to sea, and I will call a council of officers of the army and navy and see what is to be done, while you, Mr. President, had better summon your council and talk it over."

The president saw that this meant that the interview was ended, and they departed, to be soon after followed by the two sailors, Frank Fenton muttering to himself.

"Now is the chance for my revenge."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RUNAWAY.

For two reasons Major Bert Branscombe went out to Vernon Hall, the morning after the sailing of the Ill Omen frigate with her convict crew.

One of these reasons was that he was glad of an excuse to see Belle Vernon, and the other was the excuse that he might tell her of the sailing of the Ill Omen, and the truth as he had gleaned it, before her ears were overrun with the wildest stories regarding the affair.

The commodore, as the major had devoutly hoped, was in town at his business office, and Belle was alone.

She was pacing the piazza, looking out upon the scene after the storm, and she looked very beautiful in her morning dress.

As he dismounted from his horse, she gave him a smile of welcome, and said quickly:

"What is all this talk, Major Branscombe, about Captain Lonsdale having turned pirate?"

"My dear Miss Vernon, it is idle rumor, and I came to tell you what I know of his having gone to sea."

"He has gone, then?" and he saw her face saddened.

"Yes, he sailed last night in the Ill Omen."

"In that weird ship?"

"Yes, and with a weird crew, for he manned her with the convicts from The Tombs prison."

"Major Branscombe!" and Belle turned pale.

"No wonder you are surprised, Miss Vernon; but the truth is he could not get a crew, for the admiral did not treat him as he deserved, it was impossible to find seamen in the ports along the coast, and Lonsdale thereby planned to get men where he knew they were to be obtained."

"He robbed a prison of them, then?"

"He most cleverly entered the prison, made a prisoner of the keeper and his guards, and then took his pick of the convicts, many of whom were seamen and others soldiers."

"He left me at my quarters with all the nonchalance in the world, met me at the Hall at midnight, took a glass of wine with me, and then said good-by."

"An hour later when Lieutenant Latimer rushed into Military Hall with the announcement that the Ill Omen had gone to sea crowded with men, I knew what his good-by meant."

"And he had no accomplices?"

"None that any one has been able to discover."

"Still he could not do all alone?"

"No, but I assure you he did not even make a confidant of me," and the major saw that the maiden had felt that he knew more than he would tell.

"I believe you, sir, if you say so; but has not Captain Lonsdale done an unlawful act?"

"That is to be proven at the meeting this afternoon, for the admiral has called the ranking officers of the army and navy for a consultation."

"You will be one, of course, Major Branscombe?"

"Yes, Miss Vernon, I am to be so honored."

"And you will tell me the result?"

"If it is not to remain a secret; but I will at least let you know whether the feeling is against Lonsdale."

"I thank you; but oh! that fatal vessel, and I do so fear it will only bring ruin upon him."

"I hope not."

"He was so foolish to trust himself among a horde of convicts."

"Captain Stone, of The Tombs, said the men did not know they were to sail upon the Fatal Frigate, Lonsdale keeping this from them."

"Ah! I fear trouble when it becomes known, for he is alone among hundreds as savage after their confinement as uncaged tigers," said Belle Vernon, and her words and manner caused the handsome major to muse, as he mounted his horse to ride back to his quarters.

"She loves Lonsdale and he loves her, though no word has been spoken by either to let the other know it."

"My budding affection for her is hopeless, so I will check it where it is."

What induced the young major to turn, after leaving the grounds of Vernon Hall, and ride toward the country, he never knew; but, acting under a sudden impulse, he did so.

He went for a ride into the country, and had turned back, having come suddenly upon a stream, from which the bridge that had spanned it had been washed away by the torrent caused by the storm.

It was a rocky stream, with precipitous banks and a steep hill leading down to it.

"I will place some obstructions in the road, for one driving down the winding hill could not check their horses on the slope, and would go over into the torrent," he thoughtfully said.

Riding back as far as a narrow place in the road, he was about to dismount and throw up a brush heap, when he heard coming along the highway the sound of horses' hoofs and wheels.

"It is the stage from up-country, but how rapidly it is coming," he muttered.

A moment after there dashed into sight the stage drawn by its four horses, and they were directly on the road to the stream.

"Heavens! they are running away, for no driver is upon the box," he cried.

At the same moment he saw a feminine face glance out of the window.

Instantly he decided to act, and what he did was done promptly.

Wheeling his horse alongside of the runaway team, he seized the rein of the wheel-horse nearest him, and began to tug away with all his might to hold him back, at the same time speaking in a low, commanding tone to the frightened animal.

But they were too badly frightened to heed his words, or the strong pull upon the reins, and kept straight on toward the hill.

The young dragoon glanced back and saw a pale face watching him, while he heard the appealing words:

"Save me, sir!"

"I must do it," he said quickly, and he drew one of his holster-pistols and dealt the horse nearest him a terrible blow upon the head.

The animal staggered an instant, but then plunged on once more, and the young dragoon could not get near enough for a second blow, so he quickly aimed at the other animal and fired.

The report caused the leaders to bound more wildly forward; but the bullet had been well aimed, and the horse, hard hit, staggered on a few steps and fell.

His weight checked the others' speed to a great extent, and spurring alongside the team, the gallant soldier once more seized the reins, and

The Fatal Frigate.

with a herculean effort brought the maddened animal to a halt.

And just in time, for they were on the brow of the steep hill leading down to the bridgeless torrent.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE SAILOR'S SISTER.

THE moment that the stage-horses had come to a halt, Major Branscombe sprung to the ground and hastily unhitched the leaders, tying them to a tree near by, while the wheeler that had been dealt the severe blow, stood trembling by the side of his dead companion.

Having prevented a second runaway he turned to the coach to behold a lady who had just sprung out of the vehicle in which she had so nearly lost her life.

She was young, the major saw that at a glance, and he fairly started as he beheld the face, so beautiful it was.

It had been white as a corpse when he saw it at the window, but now the blood was stealing back, and her beauty was radiant.

Dressed in a neatly-fitting cloth suit, with hat and feather, and well booted, tiny feet looking out from beneath her skirt, Major Branscombe felt that she was as lovely a vision as had ever come before his delighted, astonished and admiring gaze.

Instantly he doffed his *chapeau*, and bowed low, for he saw that he stood in the presence of a lady.

Extending her hand she said softly and earnestly, and her voice was strangely full of music to the soldier's ear:

"I owe you my life, sir, and thanks are all I can offer for the boon, which you risked life to preserve, for I feared you would be killed in serving me."

"My dear madam,* I have been a soldier since my sixteenth year, have won promotion for deeds done on the field of battle, but never did an act that I am so proud of as to have saved your life."

"You are very kind, sir; but I recall, from a former trip over the road, a hill near here, with a narrow bridge spanning a rocky creek at the foot of it, and I felt death was certain should the horses dash down that descent; but I could not open the door to spring out, and something told me you would save me."

"I am glad you had confidence in me, lady; but let me tell you that the storm of last night swept the bridge away, so that death would have been certain there."

"See, this is the hill of which you speak, and the stream is not two hundred feet away."

"You can hear the torrent roaring now."

The maiden did hear it, and realizing her danger anew, she turned pale once more.

"May I ask where your driver is?" said the major, seeing her paleness.

"He stopped at the inn a mile back, to help an invalid passenger into the house, and while he was gone, a thoughtless boy with a gun, fired at a squirrel and the horses bounded away at a run."

"He is coming now," and the major turned toward a vehicle that was coming rapidly up the road.

It contained the landlord of the inn and the driver, and both of them wore a look of great alarm, which was changed to joy when they beheld the stage upright and the fair passenger standing by the roadside.

The young dragoon hastily explained the situation, told of the bridge being gone, and then said:

"My horse will work in harness, for I have tried him, so you can throw my saddle and bridle on top, hitch him in the place of the wheeler I shot, and the bridge a mile below is standing, for I came out that road, so, lady, you will not be long delayed."

This plan the driver gladly assented to, and grasping the hand of the dragoon he said warmly:

"Officer, I'm but a poor man, without education, and you is the king's soldier, with rank and all that—but my heart is honest, and I says 'God bless you forever, for if Missy Eve Lonsdale had been kilt in my stage, I'd never gotten over it, for I owe her father my life, and a nobler man never was born than that same Leo Lonsdale, for we were boys together, though he's a captain o' a fine ship now, and I'm only a driver of a stage."

"My dear fellow, I am more than happy in having served you; but may I ask, madam, if you are, as I have just heard said, the sister of Captain Lionel Lonsdale?"

"Yes, sir, I am Captain Lonsdale's sister, and I am on my way to town to see him, for we were anxious about him."

"You know my brother, then?"

"He is my particular friend, Miss Lonsdale, and I am glad indeed to meet you; but your brother sailed from port last night, I regret to say."

"My brother gone?" and the tears dimmed the beautiful eyes o' the maiden.

"I am sorry to have to tell you that he has."

* It was the old style to address all ladies, married or single, as madam—*AUTHOR.*

"Oh, it is such a disappointment, for I came here from our home on Casco Bay to see him; but it is a relief to know that he is alive, and not wounded or dead, as we feared, for a fisherman told us of a terrible battle between a British and a French frigate, and he recognized my brother upon the deck of the king's ship, but said he did not see him after the action, and feared he was wounded or slain."

"The fisherman was on his little smack, and passed near the combatants on his way into port, and his story so distressed my mother that I at once went to Portland and took the stage for this place, hoping to see Lionel here."

She spoke in a frank, earnest way, and Major Branscombe, who had never heard Lionel Lonsdale speak of his family, felt doubly glad that he had been able to serve the maiden so well.

His horse was now hitched up in the place of the dead animal, and the intelligent beast seemed to understand what a service he was rendering, and showed no signs of impatience.

"Where will you drive, Miss Lonsdale?" asked the major.

"To the Anchor Inn, sir, which, I believe, is the best one in town, as I have heard my brother speak of it."

"Yes; but have you no friends in town?"

"None, sir; but as Lionel is not there, I shall take the packet back at once to Portland, for I believe it sails to-day."

"The regular packet sailed this morning, but you will doubtless find some small coaster, equally as pleasant, sailing this afternoon, if you prefer to return that way, though it is hazardous."

"On account of the French cruisers, sir?"

"Yes, and a frigate that has of late been very troublesome along the coast."

"Still, I hope there is no danger, and, Miss Lonsdale, as your brother's friend, put me to act in his place toward you, while you are in the town."

"I am Albert Branscombe, Major of the King's Dragoons."

"I will be happy to accept your services as escort, Major Branscombe," was the response, and all being in readiness, the young soldier aided the maiden to a seat, sprung into the coach after her, and half an hour after was the envied of two-score young officers at the Anchor Inn, who saw him escorting the beautiful stranger.

CHAPTER XXV.

STARTLING TESTIMONY.

HAVING met Eve Lonsdale as he had, and become deeply interested in the lovely girl, Major Branscombe was most anxious that she should not at once leave the town.

As they drove on to the inn he told her all that had occurred, of her brother's splendid victory over the French frigate, and that envy had prevented him from commanding the new vessel, the *Saturn*, but how he had gotten the best of all by his boldly manning his vessel from the prison.

"But, Major Branscombe, is not the *Ill Omen* the vessel that is called the Fatal Frigate?"

"Yes, Miss Lonsdale, and under your brother's command she certainly proved fatal to the *Le Roi*."

"Yet they say ill-fortune dogs all who sail in her."

"I have heard so, Miss Lonsdale; but your brother que led the mutiny on board, captured the Frenchman, defeated his enemy, Lieutenant Fenton, as I told you, got a crew against all odds, and I predict that he will win fame in the Fatal Frigate."

"I sincerely hope so," was the reply.

Soon after the stage stopped at the inn, and conducting Eve to the parlor, the major ordered for her the best room in the house.

Then he ascertained regarding the sailing of an Eastern-bound vessel, and, to his dismay discovered that a new and trim schooner was to sail about sunset.

Now the major wished, as I have said, to prolong the stay of the lovely girl, and the idea struck him to at once seek Belle Vernon, of whom he had spoken to Eve as one of her brother's friends.

So at once he sprung upon his horse and rode rapidly out to Vernon Hall.

Belle was a little surprised to see him so soon again, but he quickly told his story, and asked her if she would not call upon her at the inn, and also chaperon her on board the packet, if she must go.

Eve was delighted at the chance to see Lionel Lonsdale's sister, and she replied:

"I was going to say I would drive to the inn and bring her home with me, and I hope she will remain my guest for some days at least."

Major Branscombe was delighted, and going back to the inn, he sent up for Eve and told her of Miss Vernon's visit.

On the way to the inn Eve had stopped for her father, and he accompanied her on her visit to the young girl, and they would hear of no refusal, but Eve must go home with them.

She consented to go to dinner, but was firm in her resolve to return home at once, as her mother would be very anxious regarding her, and so Major Branscombe went down to engage

a state-room for her at the little schooner, after which he had promised to dine at Vernon Hall.

As he stepped aside from the carriage, after assisting the party into it, he was asked a hundred and one questions by his brother officers, for the Anchor Inn was next door to Military Hall.

He also overheard the remark of Lieutenant Fenton, as he caught sight of Eve Lonsdale:

"A beautiful girl, indeed; but who is she?" No one was able to answer that question except Bert Branscombe, and he gave no information upon the subject, but walked rapidly down to the wharf where the schooner lay that was to sail for Portland.

The best state-room on board was engaged for the fair passenger, and then the young officer hastened up to the council of war, which was to be held at that hour at the admiral's quarters, and where it was to be decided what should be done in the matter of the flight of the Fatal Frigate.

Major Branscombe was a little late, and glancing around the room, upon the score of faces present, he saw that something of a serious nature had transpired.

He saw there the admiral in the chair of State, the colonel commanding the forts, the post captain, President of the Town Council and his colleagues, Captain Stone, Lieutenant Fenton and half a dozen officers of various ranks, belonging to the army and navy.

There were also several seamen there whom Captain Ford whispered to him, were witnesses of a most important character.

It did not take the young major long to discover that testimony was being brought that was of a most hurtful kind to Lionel Lonsdale.

There had been found several seamen as witnesses, who had sworn that they had been approached by others, who were agents of Captain Lonsdale, to urge them to enlist for a cruise on the *Ill Omen*.

The object of this cruise they were told, was to become pirates.

It had never been before that a frigate had been a pirate vessel, it was said, and Captain Lonsdale had told his agents that the *Ill Omen* was very fast, a splendid sea boat, and with a crew of convicts, which he intended to get, he could readily turn buccaneer, and thereby make the fortune of all who went with him.

The witnesses had said nothing about the affair, as they regarded it as a joke, until they that morning found that the *Ill Omen* had gone to sea in the night with a convict crew.

"By heavens! they are trying to make out that Lonsdale has turned pirate," said Major Branscombe to Captain Ford, and his words were heard all over the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OUTLAWED.

The men who testified against Captain Lonsdale were a hang-dog looking set, four in number.

One was from the *Saturn*, being a coxswain on board, another was from a coasting schooner and the other two were employed at the shipping yard.

Their testimony all agreed, however, and the fact remained that the *Ill Omen* had gone, no one knew of her going until she set sail, and her crew had been taken from the prison.

Major Branscombe thought that the admiral looked pained at this testimony, and he seemed very anxious to make the witnesses tell all they knew.

Then it was asked if Captain Lonsdale had made known his departure to any one present?

"If he did it was to Major Branscombe," said Frank Fenton.

"You were not asked the question, sir, for other than yourself," hotly said the major, and the lieutenant's face flushed.

"Did Captain Lonsdale make known to you, sir, his intention to leave as he did?" asked the admiral.

"He did not, and I was, I think, the last one who parted with him among all of our friends."

"After the affair of the afternoon, of which you know, admiral, and that Lieutenant Fenton has not forgotten, I went with him on board his vessel."

"Coming on shore I parted with him near the India wharf, as he said he had an important engagement, but would meet me at the Military Hall later."

"I met him there, and we had some wine together, after which he told me good-by in a manner that impressed me at the time."

"That is all that I have to tell, sir."

"Or will tell," said Frank Fenton, in a low tone.

But it reached the ears of the major, who said quickly:

"Was not yesterday's lesson enough for you, sir?"

All understood the allusion and many laughed.

"Zounds! silence!" roared the admiral. The testimony was then brought up that Lionel Lonsdale preferred to remain on board the *Ill Omen* to coming on shore, and had taken from the French frigate all that he needed for his vessel.

To this the admiral testified.

Also it came out that the Fatal Frigate had been fitted out at the expense of Lionel Lonsdale, after the admiral had refused to allow a pound of British gold to be spent upon her.

Then, his having told no one of his intention to sail looked suspicious, and a web of guilt began to be woven about the young officer that was very damaging.

It was circumstantial evidence alone, but it was sufficient with many to appear as proof positive.

Major Branscombe watched the proceedings very carefully, and he saw that every new suggestion, or question, came from Frank Fenton or his immediate friends.

Having evolved what appeared real facts in the case, those present, it could be seen, were ready to condemn without one word from the man they accused.

The admiral had been very moderate, and urged delay; but there were others that thought immediate action should be taken to at once capture the Ill Omen, before her daring commander and his convict crew could do much harm.

Then the president of the council arose and suggested that the admiral do all in his power to fit out the Saturn, man her with the seamen then in port, taking them from any vessel they could find them on, and send her out under command of Lieutenant Fenton to capture the pirate.

A number applauded at this, and, to the surprise of all, Major Branscombe arose and said:

"I think the advice good, and the sooner Lieutenant Fenton sails in his splendid frigate, in chase of the Ill Omen, that much sooner will it be known if Lionel Lonsdale has turned his ship into a pirate."

Lieutenant Latimer then urged that, under the circumstances of the Ill Omen's leaving port, and the testimony against her commander, proving piratical tendencies, it would be proper to outlaw the frigate as a buccaneer ship.

Applause greeted this announcement also, and a vote was taken, the admiral wishing to be on the safe side, to see if the Ill Omen should be outlawed.

The majority said yes, and the Ill Omen, Captain Lionel Lonsdale commanding, under the circumstances attending the departure of the vessel to sea, was accordingly outlawed.

In disgust, Major Branscombe, Captain Ford and others that believed in the young captain of the Fatal Frigate, arose and left the quarters.

With an angry face, Bert Branscombe hastened toward Vernon Hall, muttering to himself:

"It is far best that she does sail to-day, and I only hope she can get away before it becomes known what those fools have done against her noble brother."

"But woe be unto Frank Fenton, if he attempts to capture the Ill Omen!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PACKET SETS SAIL.

As anxious as had been Major Branscombe to have Eve Lonsdale remain over for a few days in the town, he was, after leaving the council, where the Ill Omen had been outlawed, even more anxious that she should depart.

He knew that she was grieved not to have found her brother in port, and he saw that it cut her to feel that he had gone to sea as he had, with a convict crew; but to learn that he had been outlawed for his act, he was sure would be a bitter blow to her.

That she must know it later, he felt assured; but her home was upon Casco Bay, and in those days there were not "rapid transits" to carry news, or enterprising newspapers to get out "extras," as now, and months might pass before she heard the sad tidings.

In that time the Saturn might have met the Ill Omen and the truth be known as to whether Lionel Lonsdale, an American it was true, but the pluckiest officer in the king's navy, had turned his vessel into a pirate cruiser.

So the major determined to keep silent upon the matter of the council, and to get Eve Lonsdale on board the pretty little packet as soon as possible.

To dine at Vernon Hall was always a treat, for the dinners there were something to remember with delight; but that day, though Belle had displayed her best housekeeping talent, somehow the major did not seem to enjoy the meal.

The truth was he feared that some one would drop in with the bad tidings about Lionel Lonsdale.

After dinner, when the ladies left the table, Major Branscombe told the commodore of the judgment against the Ill Omen.

"The idiots! I was asked to be there and give my views, but I am glad that I was not one among the number of blockheads to write myself down an ass," said the commodore, with just indignation.

Then he continued:

"Lonsdale is a gentleman, born so, and if I had had my doubts about it before, seeing his lovely sister would have removed them."

"He was shabbily treated by old Fenton and his son."

"He should have had the Saturn, and knowing he would be overleaped, he prepared to hold on to the Ill Omen, while, unable to get a crew with the admiral's aid, he got one by his own energy."

"And such a crew? The Lord deliver us!" and the commodore laughed.

"If they can be made aught out of, Lonsdale will do it, sir."

"Egad! but he will, and those that do not do as he says will wish that they had remained in jail."

"By Neptune, sir, but I am glad that Lonsdale took the devils, and if he gets half of them killed in action he will do the colonies a service."

"But you say the admiral said he meant to appoint Lonsdale to the command of the Saturn?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is well enough to say so now; but he will send his son on her, and the orders are to catch the Ill Omen."

"Yes, commodore."

"The Saturn is the heavier craft, in guns, and crew, for she will carry five hundred men; but she had better steer clear of those convicts, with Lonsdale at their head, if she signals to him."

"You're a pirate and I'm ordered to take you," and the commodore laughed at his own conceit.

After some further conversation on the injustice of branding Lionel Lonsdale as an outlaw, the two gentlemen arose and joined the young ladies in the parlor.

Belle had just urged her guest to sing, and Eve was running her fingers lightly over the strings of a Spanish guitar as the commodore and the major entered.

Without affectation, and in a voice full of melody, Eve sang an old ballad that impressed her hearers greatly and brought tears to the eyes of the old commodore.

That all three were charmed with the young girl goes without saying, and Belle urged and urged her to remain as her guest for a week at least.

The commodore also politely urged it, though, like the major, he was anxious to get her away before she should hear the news of the treatment of her brother.

"I must return at once to mother, for she was not well when I left, and only anxiety about my mother could have brought me here now," she said.

Major Branscombe felt around in his own mind, that some other cause than to see if Lionel Lonsdale was wounded, had brought her to the farm, for a few words that she let fall gave him that belief.

As Belle, in the warmth of her heart, still urged the maiden to remain, if only for the next packet, she caught a look from the major that she saw meant for her to desist, though why, she, of course, did not know.

The carriage was soon after called, and the few entering it, drove down to the wharf, the little traveling box Eve having already been sent down from the inn.

As they passed Military Hall, the young officers seated upon the piazza, arose to a man and bent low in salute, for never had it been their pleasure to see two more lovely maidens than were Belle Vernon and Eve Lonsdale; but not one could answer the oft repeated question about the fair stranger: "Who is she?"

Arriving at the wharf they found the schooner a very fine looking craft.

She was a coaster, stopping at several ports, and had been built for speed, and with more of a view to passengers than freight.

The state-room Major Branscombe had selected for Eve was the largest and best, and she thanked him in her frank way by putting out her hand and saying:

"You have been so good to me."

"Do you fear the landsman's dread, Miss Lonsdale, sea sickness?" asked the commodore.

"Oh, no, indeed, sir, for I am a sailor myself, and have my own little yacht to give you a cruise in when you pay me the promised visit with your daughter."

"And you are invited too, Major Branscombe," she added with a sweet smile.

Leaving them in the cabin—Bert Branscombe slipped out to see if any one connected with the schooner had heard of the Ill Omen having been proclaimed an outlaw, and was delighted to find that for once bad tidings had not traveled fast.

"When will you sail, captain?" he asked of the honest-faced skipper who was admiring his little vessel, for this was her first voyage.

"I am ready, sir, whenever the lady bids her friends good-by."

"We will go at once then; but, captain, have you no other passengers?"

"None, sir, this trip, though my wife and little girl are along and they'll be company for the miss."

"So they will, and you'll doubtless make a quick run, for you have a fine vessel," and Major Branscombe hastened into the cabin to say that the skipper was anxious to be off, though he knew that it was his anxiety to get the schooner away before some meddlesome

triterer would come along and inform the crew of the Ill Omen's outlawry.

Farewells were accordingly said, and Eve accompanied her new-found friends on deck, and there waved them farewell, as the pretty schooner went flying down the harbor.

As they turned to enter the carriage, for the commodore was to drop the major at Military Hall, a boat landed at the wharf, coming from a brig that had just run in, and all three heard the words of the skipper as a friend met him:

"There's a pirate in the offing, and the skipper of yonder trim craft had better look out, or he'll get caught."

"He was too far off for me to signal him not to go out."

It was with real dismay that the party in the carriage heard these words of the old skipper, for the schooner was gone now beyond recall, and must take her chances.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PURSUIT.

"ONE moment, please, commodore," said Major Branscombe, as the carriage was about to drive on, and the soldier added:

"With your permission, may I question yonder skipper?"

"With pleasure, for I would like to know just what he has to say," answered the commodore.

The skipper was called to the side of the carriage, and saluting in an awkward way, at the request of the major told his story.

"Thar's a pirit' in the offing, sir, and if my Gay Betty hadn't been pretty lively with her heels, he'd 'a' caught us."

"You are sure it's a pirate?"

"As sure as seeing the black flag at his peak kin make me, sir."

"Ah! he showed his sable colors, then?"

"I don't know as ter what yer calls sable, officer, but he showed ther skull an' cross-bones on a black flag."

"That was enough to stamp him as a pirate; but where did he sight you?"

"Ten leagues to ther south'ard, and he chased me within a league o' port, and were gettin' near enough ter use his iron, when I run in."

"You had a narrow escape, e."

"Yes, sir, it were pretty hairer, narrerer than I likes."

"And which way did he head after giving you up?"

"Out seaward, sir."

"And his vessel, what was it?"

"A schooner, and she looked old, fer her sails was patched, and thar was a look of a long cruise about her; but she c'u'd go and no mistake."

"Thank you, skipper," and as the carriage drove on Major Branscombe said:

"I shall go and see the admiral and ask if there is no vessel in port to go out in chase, for it would be a fearful thing for the pirate to capture the schooner that has just sailed."

"It would indeed, major," answered the commodore while Belle turned pale at the thought and said:

"Oh, something should be done."

"There is no vessel of the Government here, I am sure, that can be used, but I have a brig that is very fleet, and she is being fitted out for a privateer, having her pivot forecastle gun already mounted, so if young Fenton will go on board her with some of his men, I will gladly let him have her," said the commodore.

"If he will not, sir, I will, for I am a sailor too, having been a middy in the English navy, before I went to India and joined the king's dragoons."

"I will get me a crew, if Fenton acts churlish, as he may."

"Egad, but I'm half-tempted to go too."

"You will do no such thing, father mine," said Belle, and the major now sprung out at the Military Hall, the commodore promising to send a note at once to the keeper of the brig, to let Major Branscombe have her, in case he needed her.

"Ah, Fenton, I was just looking for you."

"A word, please," said Bert Branscombe, as he beheld the lieutenant coming out of the Hall.

Frank Fenton looked surprised, for he had not forgotten the sharp words of the major at the council, nor that he had been the second of Lionel Lonsdale.

"Well, Major Branscombe?" he said coldly.

"I have just seen a lady friend off on a packet schooner, and a skipper coming in reported that he had been chased into port by a pirate that is still in the offing."

"Nonsense, these skippers are taking every privateer afloat now for pirates."

"This one has made no such a mistake, for he is a blunt old sea-dog, and said the pirate showed his black flag."

"Well, we have not a vessel in port that can be sent after him, I am sorry to say."

"I have the offer of a vessel, a brig belonging to Commodore Vernon, if you will command and man her."

"I am sorry, but we are too busy now pushing the work on the Saturn to spare the men, and I have to go to overlook them."

The Fatal Frigate.

"I will command the brig then, Fenton, if you will spare me the men."

"I believe you know I was formerly in the royal navy?"

"Ah, yes; but I cannot possibly spare the men, major."

"I am sorry, for if the packet is captured, the young lady on board may be subjected to very harsh treatment."

"I am sorry; but the Saturn must go to sea within the week, and we are to begin working on her night and day."

Bert Branscombe bowed and walked on into the Military Hall.

Half a hundred young officers were there, some of them belonging to the navy, and others to the cavalry, infantry and artillery.

"Who is with me, gentlemen, in an attempt to capture a pirate now in the offing?"

"Lieutenant Fenton is too busy, and so are his men, he says; but I have a fine brig, with a pivot twenty-four mounted forward, and I want volunteer officers, for I shall stop at the fort and get a crew for the gun, and Captain Nash I know will give me a company of infantry."

"That will I, major, and go with you," cried the officer referred to.

"And I."

"And I," came in a chorus of voices.

In ten minutes time Major Branscombe had a score of officers enrolled, Captain Nash had gone to march his company from the barracks to the wharf, and the rest bastioned down to the brig.

Word came from the commodore to the keeper, as they got there, and a score of sailors were gotten for the expedition, under the incentive of prize-money, and one hour after the refusal of Frank Fenton to go, or to permit his crew to go, he was surprised, as he stood on the deck of the Saturn, to see the pretty brig, the *Belle of Blue Water*, sail by, and upon her decks a score of officers, as many seamen, and a company of infantry.

He bit his lips with vexation that he had not been more accommodating, watched the brig as she rounded to at the fort, and to his chagrin saw the commandant himself go off with a boat-load of artillerymen.

Then the brig swept on once more in chase of the pirate in the offing.

Climbing into the rigging with his glass Frank Fenton turned it seaward, and what he saw caused him to mutter:

"They are too late!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PIRATE IN THE OFFING.

IT did not take Major Branscombe, in his new position as commander of a vessel, to discover that the brig was not in the best condition for a chase.

Her sails had just been bent on and did not fit, she was not properly trimmed, owing to the want of her other guns, and she was "down by the head," so that her speed was deadened.

Still she was a fine craft, with the defects mentioned remedied, though she was not making very rapid headway.

However, no other vessel could have been obtained, on so short notice, and all the young commander and his volunteer crew could do, would be to run out and try and save the packet schooner from the pirate.

The sun was yet half an hour high, when the brig gained a point of observation out in open water.

Then every eye swept the horizon, and a cry arose from many lips, as the pirate was sighted.

He was a league, or more away, crowding on sail under the ten-knot breeze and in full chase of the packet schooner, which was leading him over a mile.

The packet schooner, it could be seen, had slipped out of the harbor, while the pirate was off seaward.

Her skipper had without doubt seen the buccaneer, and recognized him as a suspicious craft; but instead of putting back to port, as he could have done, he had determined to take the chances of a trial of speed with the pirate.

The latter had evidently sighted the packet and at once given chase.

The brig was crowded with all the canvas she would bear, and went along at a lively pace, which showed what she would do under favorable circumstances, but light as she was in her load below decks, the sea, which was rough, knocked her off her course considerably.

"We are losing rapidly," said Major Branscombe, as he saw that the pirate was gaining upon them.

The outlaw schooner did look, even at that distance, as though she had seen rough usage, for she was badly weather beaten, and her sails were dark and patched.

Still she slipped along through the rough waters at a great pace, and Major Branscombe watched her eagerly, as he knew that the sun would soon set and shut her from view.

A close observation told him that the packet schooner was gaining on the pirate.

He looked again, but not wishing to trust his own eyes, handed the glass to first one officer

and then another, asking what they thought. The universal response was:

"The packet is dropping the pirate rapidly."

As this seemed to be the opinion of all, and the brig was being left far astern, the young soldier felt that there was but one thing for him to do, and that was to put back.

He knew that the brig was not provisioned, and that he had no right to stand on under the circumstances.

Had the brig shown better speed, and the packet not been gaining on the pirate, so that there had been a chance of success, it would have been well enough to stand on; but, as it was the brig would be left out of sight in an hour more.

So Major Branscombe gave the order to go about, and with the wind fair for a run back to port the *Belle of Blue Water* went skimming along, while those on her decks discovered the chase as far as it had extended, and one and all prophesied that the packet would run the pirate hull down by midnight.

"It is strange he did not fire on the packet," said Captain Nash.

Hardly had the words left his lips when far off on the sea was heard the boom of a heavy gun.

Then again came the sound, and again; but as the firing was kept up it seemed pretty certain that the packet had not been forced to come to, and the guns of the pirate revealed the fact that he was playing his last card to capture the fleet little merchant craft.

It was dark when the brig rounded to at the fort, to land the gallant colonel and his artillerymen, and by the time the vessel had been again put in the hands of the keeper it was nine o'clock.

Still, although in those good old Colonial days good hours were kept, Major Branscombe felt assured that the commodore and Belle had not retired, and he accordingly hastened out to Vernon Hall.

It was as he had supposed, the father and daughter were seated together in the large and comfortable sitting-room, and the butler ushered him at once in there.

He was greeted most cordially, and the commodore called out:

"What luck, my gallant soldier of the sea?"

"Well, sir, I have the satisfaction of knowing that the packet outfooted the pirate rapidly," and Bert Branscombe told the story of his run out and return.

"And Fenton refused you, you say?"

"Yes, commodore; but if he had gone, or let his men go, we could have gone without any delay, and run out in time to get between the pirate and the packet, which would have allowed the former to readily escape him, even had we not had a brush with the outlaw."

"I cannot understand this feeling on the part of Fenton," said the commodore.

"It is envy and hatred, father," was the quiet response of Belle Vernon.

"Well commodore, I hope and believe that the packet has escaped. But allow me to offer my sincerest thanks for the loan of the *Belle of Blue Water*, and I assure you, when she is in perfect trim, she will deserve her name, as, under the circumstances, she did nobly."

"I believe she will make a name for herself, Branscombe, and I know she would if I could get a man like Lonsdale to command her."

"Egad, sir, if he is cashiered for running out with the *Ill Omen*, as he did, I'll make him captain of my brig."

"And mark my words, Branscombe, it will not be long before just such vessels as is the brig, will be under a colonial flag, fighting against the king."

"Ah, commodore, I much fear me you are right; but I hope, sir, from my heart, there will be no cruel war between the Colonies and the mother country, nearly allied as we are in blood and interests."

"It will be the fault of the crown if there is, major; but it is sure to come."

"I cannot but feel, sir, that Englishmen are the oppressors; but still, as a soldier of the king, if the tocsin of war sounds, I must fight against the Colonists, though my heart will feel for them deeply."

"You are a noble fellow, Branscombe, and, come what may, there are certain friendships that will last through all, for blood is thicker than water."

"Come, a glass with you before you go, and we'll drink to the safe arrival home of that lovely girl Eve Lonsdale, who, if I was a quarter of a century younger, I would ask to marry me, for I am half in love with her, verging on to three score years though I am."

Soon after Bert Branscombe took his leave, and, as he walked rapidly along toward Military Hall, reviewing the happenings of the last twenty-four hours, he mused to himself:

"I can give Belle Vernon up now without a pang, for Eve Lonsdale is the one I would win."

"But alas! she is an American. I am English, and war must soon come between her land and mine, while, after all, she may already be in love."

"Ah me! I fear I am getting heart-hurt in earnest!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CONVICT CREW.

WHEN Lionel Lonsdale ran out of the harbor on board the *Ill Omen*, and with a convict crew under his command, he knew the desperate chances that he was taking.

He had weighed well the getting of his crew from the prison.

He held his commission as a captain in the royal navy, and he had won it by his gallantry, when he knew, as an American, he was looked upon with envy, ay, and hated by the English officers, especially those his junior in rank and senior in years.

But his daring deeds, since he was made a midshipman for saving an admiral's life, had commanded recognition, until he had gained his captaincy.

Orders to take command of the *Ill Omen*, for an unlimited time, with permission to go upon cruises, as he deemed best, he also held, and here Frank Fenton had overreached himself, for his was the wording of the document which his father had signed, for he used it as a bait to get Lionel Lonsdale to take command of the Fatal Frigate, that it might lead up to his disgrace, and his own triumph over him.

As Lonsdale preferred not to go ashore under waiting orders, he had a right to remain on the *Ill Omen*, and he had, when his crew had been taken from him, gotten from the old admiral permission to secure men where he could find them.

To get this in writing, Lionel Lonsdale had written the admiral, regarding some matter pertaining to the prize, the frigate *Le Roi*, cunningly inserting in it such wording about securing a crew that the old officer replied as he had expected, putting his name to a paper that the young captain could use as he deemed best.

In the trial, by the assembled officers and council, Admiral Fenton did not recall this, and so, influenced by his son, who had again usurped control of his father, he had been led to pronounce the *Ill Omen* an outlawed craft.

That he broke no law in releasing the prisoners, as he was using them for Government service, and not setting them free, Lionel Lonsdale felt convinced.

But he knew that he might expect trouble with the same prisoners.

They might turn upon him to regain their freedom, and run the vessel to any port they wished.

They might choose to make the ship a pirate.

And more, when they knew it was the ill-fated frigate, with a lady in white parading its decks at night, they might murder him for having brought them face to face with the supernatural.

All these things Lionel Lonsdale knew well, and, as the anchor was raised, the sail set, and the frigate's bow turned seaward, in the face of the thunder-storm, he knew that the fight was begun and that there was no turning back.

The moment the *Ill Omen* was on her way to sea, he called Robert Manly into his cabin and said:

"You know the men best suited among the crew to act as officers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Remember, I can give no commissions, allow no insignias of rank to be used that conflict with the king's officers; but I can equip the crew in naval dress, fitting them out as thoroughly as any vessel in the king's service, for I have all on board."

"I can rig out in marine uniform sixty-four men and officers for them."

"The sailors will have over them their under officers, the same as on a vessel-of-war under the king."

"As to my officers, I have uniforms, with no insignia of rank however."

"I will need the full complement of officers for the frigate, and I wish you to tell me who they shall be, after yourself as acting-senior-lieutenant and your son as junior lieutenant."

"As they will rank, call them into the cabin, and remember, I want the best men for the positions."

"I understand, sir, and I must tell you that for the marines there are three among the prisoners who have held respectfully the ranks of major, captain and lieutenant, yet fell from grace from some cause, and were sent to prison."

"Very well, there are my captain and two lieutenants of marines, and they can agree upon the non-commissioned officers."

"Now to my ship's officers."

"Again, sir, we have men who have held high positions in the service, for you must know, Captain Lonsdale, that The Temps has been a military, naval and civil prison combined, and many men have been placed there from false accusations, petty envy and like causes, though I do not pretend to deny that the greater number were deserving of their punishment."

"To begin, sir, there are two who were lieutenants in the royal navy, several from the Colonial Coast-Guard Marine, and more who were in the merchant service as skippers and mates."

"Very well, Mr. Manly, call your son here, and then send him to fetch the ones you deem suited for the positions of acting officers."

This was done, and as the frigate began to bound over the storm-swept waters of the sea, having dropped the harbor leagues astern, the cabin of her young commander was filled with the new-fledged officers, thirty in number.

In a few terse words Lionel Lonsdale told them why he had taken them, that he held his commission as captain in the royal navy, and as commander of the frigate for an unlimited cruise, and added by saying that he intended to make a name for the vessel that would give for one and all of them a pardon for their past offenses, and make them honest citizens again.

"Now, gentlemen, you know your duties, so go to your posts of duty and execute them, for I shall allow no lax discipline upon this ship."

"If there are those among you and the crew, who deem you have come out for different reasons than I now tell you, I will disabuse the mind very quickly of each one who so believes."

"There are officers' uniforms in the wardroom, from which you can fit yourselves out with storm-suits and all clothing necessary, while the same for the crew are in the steerage."

"When the sun rises I expect every prison suit to have been thrown into the sea, and every man on board this ship to be in proper attire and at his post."

"Then I will tell you and the crew a secret."

Such was the ending of Lionel Lonsdale's words to his newly-appointed officers, and each man left the cabin deeply imbued with the idea that they had a man as commander who would stand no trifling.

But what that secret was that they were to hear not a man could guess.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SECRET.

WHEN the day dawned, the land had been dropped from sight, and the skies had been swept from storm-clouds.

The sun arose in a cloudless sky, a stiff breeze was blowing, and the waves, lashed into mountains of water by the fierce winds of the night before, were fast running down.

All night long the newly appointed officers had worked at their tasks of getting things to rights.

The ship was in perfect condition, and under such circumstances it did not take long for the officers to rig out in the uniforms, cover them with their storm-suits, and then see that the crew were equally as well provided.

Sub-officers were chosen, such as boatswain, gunners, sail-makers, carpenters, coxswain, and in fact all that were necessary, and men were among the prisoners to fit every position.

The marine officers had uniformed themselves, and then their men, and thus, before dawn the Ill Omen was a thoroughly manned vessel-of-war.

Of course the gun crews, seamen and marines would have to be drilled in their respective duties, but as far as order and discipline went the convict crew were fitted into their respective places most thoroughly.

Not once had Lionel Lonsdale left his cabin.

He was determined to leave all to his officers and see by morning just what timber he had under him.

Just at dawn Robert Manly entered the cabin, where Lionel Lonsdale sat writing down the names and acting ranks of his newly appointed officers, and requested his presence on deck.

He knew not what was wanted, nor asked; but promptly arose and obeyed the summons.

The rain had ceased, the clouds were breaking away, and a tinge of the rising sun was visible in the East.

The men were all at quarters, and the officers grouped near.

Then Robert Manly addressed the captain and said:

"Captain Lonsdale, in behalf of your officers and crew, I beg of you permission to lay the ship to and call all hands to witness burial at sea."

"Ah! who has been killed?" asked the young commander quietly.

"No one has been killed, sir; but that dark mass you see there, sir, on the deck, we wish to bury out of sight forever. It comprises the prison garb of your convict crew. We wish to bury it in the sea, Captain Lonsdale, forever out of sight."

"I gladly give my permission, and may your acts in the future gain you full pardon for the deeds that caused you to wear the garb of criminals," was the prompt response, and the words reached every ear in the ship.

"And, my men," continued Captain Lonsdale, "determined now to tell the secret that he wished them to know."

"It is my desire to make known to you all that this is a king's ship, commissioned as such, and that I sought your aid, as a crew, because I could not otherwise man my vessel."

"There is honor to be won upon the high seas, and prize money will follow every victory, while your deeds of daring, and service rendered, will win for you a full pardon for the past."

"But there is one thing I wish you to know, a secret that I have to tell you, and I wish no coward heart on board this vessel, to shrink from his duty through superstitious fear."

"This ship, I wish you all to know, is the one whom men call *the Fatal Frigate!*"

At these fateful words the helmsmen let go the wheel, the ship swept up into the wind and lay to, and a silence like unto the presence of death fell upon every man in the Fatal Frigate, while the eyes of all were bent upon the daring man who had just told them the dread secret of the ship.

Seeing the pallor upon every face, for in their prison-walls the men had heard again and again of the Fatal Frigate, Lonsdale smiled, and added:

"I felt that my secret would surprise you, men; but, let me tell you that this vessel began with bad luck, but will end with good fortune. From the day she was launched until lately, a fatality of evil seemed to follow in her wake."

"But a short while ago I was sent on board of her with but half a crew, and we were ordered to capture the French frigate Le Roi, in every way our superior. A mutiny broke out among those who feared to go in this vessel, and officers as well as men showed their coward hearts. But, I quelled that mutiny, though life had to be taken in doing so, and we went on the hunt for the Frenchman."

"Again trouble came, for my crew refused to fight such odds; but I seized a battle-lantern, stood over the magazine, and ordered the men into action, or take the consequences."

"We fought and captured the Frenchman, and you saw the frigate, a prize in the harbor, as we left it."

"So the luck of the Ill Omen has changed, and though her decks are visited by night, at times, by a ghostly form, that Woman in White will be our guardian angel, and as long as she haunts our ship, no harm can befall us."

"If any of you now fear to sail under me, I warn you that I will stand no trifling with foolish fears, for each man who gives me trouble I shall place in irons and carry back to his cell in The Tombs."

"Does any man on this deck now say that this Fatal Frigate shall not sail the seas from fear of her fatal record of the past, and that she is now haunted by a spirit crew?"

"I, for one, will never sail upon a craft that is accursed!" came the stern rejoinder.

And a murmur of assent was heard among the crew, as a seaman stepped out from the line and confronted the young commander of the Fatal Frigate, while every eye now turned from one to the other, and every heart almost stood still to see who would gain the mastery.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MASTER HAND.

THE face of Lionel Lonsdale did not change a muscle when he found that there was one to oppose him, and he knew that one leader might carry the entire crew with him. He did not even glance toward his officers to see if they would remain true to him.

He was well aware that he was not fighting bodily fear, but superstition, and could understand well the terrors felt at that time for anything bordering on the supernatural.

"My man," he said in the same calm, but distinct tones, "the crew who sailed under me before held the same views regarding this ship that you expressed."

"They called her accursed, and yet they arrived back in port in safety and victorious, with a heavy prize-money to their credit."

"Now, had not Admiral Fenton taken those men from me, they would have sailed again under my command in this same 'accursed' ship."

"As witnesses of the truth of my words, there are now, I learn, fifteen men here who deserted from the new and splendid frigate Saturn to come on the Ill Omen."

"I did not wish for deserters, and expected those men to be left behind, when I learned they were to come; but I have since been told that they refused to return and are here now. Let them stand forth."

Fifteen men at once formed in line some steps in front of the young commander.

"Thank you, my men; you can return to your posts."

They saluted and stepped back, and their presence seemed to induce many into favoring a cruise on the Fatal Frigate.

Then Lonsdale continued:

"When deserted by my crew, my men, I remained on board this vessel, alone with my negro servant. So far from ill-fortune overtaking me, I beheld the ghostly form that walks these decks by night, and whom men call the Woman in White. She hailed my boat as I came off, and told me to come on board, while she hailed and ordered off a boat that held my foe."

"From this vessel I went to fight a duel, and fought two, in both of which fate sided with me, and now I love the old craft."

"I have had her fitted out at my own expense, her spars added to, and her armament increased, until to-day no finer vessel floats the seas, and we need fear no enemy."

"Now, my man, step back to your post of duty, and let no superstitious dread fill your

soul, for the Fatal Frigate shall go on her cruise, or she shall go to the bottom of the sea."

"I am not alone, captain, in my dread of this craft, as you will find out, and I say that you shall head for the land and put us ashore," came the response of the seaman.

"You either go to your duty, sir, or you go into irons and back to your cell in The Tombs. Which shall it be?"

"I rule here, for there are men to back me up and seize this craft!" shouted the ringleader, and he glanced quickly behind him.

"Mr. Manly, put that man in irons! If he resists, I shall kill him!"

There was no mistaking this command, and Robert Manly stepped forward to obey; but the mutineer turned to his comrades and called out:

"Back me up, mates, and the ship is ours for a pirate cruise!"

These words made known his intention, and those who crowded toward him proved that the subject had already been talked over.

But, suddenly, there came the crack of a pistol in the hands of Lionel Lonsdale, and the mutineer dropped dead on the deck of the Fatal Frigate.

The men who had rushed toward him halted quickly, amazed and checked for the instant, and seeing that he must act promptly, Lionel Lonsdale called out:

"Ho, Brandywine! Bring me the cord!"

The huge negro at the call, bounded out of the cabin, holding a stout cord in his hand, one end of which seemed fast below decks.

"Men!" shouted Lonsdale in a voice that rang over the Fatal Frigate, "this cord I hold is fast at the other end to a musket aimed into the magazine. Obey my orders, or I blow the Fatal Frigate into eternity!"

A perfect howl of terror went up from the crew, and then came dead silence once more.

"Mr. Manly, there are six mutineers there; place them all in irons!"

The words of the daring leader broke the spell, and Robert Manly stepped forward, followed by several other officers, among whom was his son, and the mutineers were at once secured.

"Men, you were not ruled by your superstitious fears of this ship, but led by your dead ringleader, you intended to turn this vessel into a pirate craft, and I now, for your crime, pronounce judgment upon you. That judgment is that you be hung to the yard-arm at once!"

Not a word of dissent came from the now thoroughly cowed crew, for their eyes were upon the firm hand of the young captain, who held the cord, the other end of which was fast to the trigger of a musket, and that musket pointed into the powder in the magazine.

The six doomed men were completely stunned by the sudden and terrible manner in which their desperate plan had been checked by their daring captain, and they seemed passive in the hands of those who, at the order of Lionel Lonsdale, were placing the ropes about their necks to hang them.

The frigate rolled upon the waters, the crew swayed with its motion, stood in anxious, nervous expectancy, while the preparations for the hanging went on, and calm and stern stood the young commander, his hand grasping the fatal cord, and Brandywine, equally as unmoved, standing by his side.

"All ready, sir," said Robert Manly, brusquely.

Then every eye was upon Lionel Lonsdale.

"Men, at your feet lies the body of the man who intended to take this ship from me."

"You, in following his lead deserve his fate; but I will spare you this time, but remember, I shall rule my own vessel."

"Mr. Manly, release those men, please, and let them go to their duties."

An instant of silence, and then, at this mercy on the part of one who had it in his power to kill, the whole crew broke forth in one loud cry of joy that ended in cheer after cheer, for

"Our brave captain and the Fatal Frigate!"

Lionel Lonsdale's face still changed no muscle, but raising his hat he said:

"I thank you, my men."

"Now, let the burial of the garb you cast aside forever, take place."

The men, who had arranged for the burial of their convict garb, now stepped forward, and while one, who it was said had once been an army chaplain in England, repeated the Service for the Dead, the mass of clothing, which was sewed up in a canvas shroud, and weighted with solid shot, was thrown overboard into the sea.

As it disappeared from sight, Captain Lonsdale gave orders to get the ship under way once more and told Mr. Manly to lay her course for Casco Bay while the other officers were told to drill the men in their respective duties, as soon as they had had breakfast, and thus interest them in the ship and also keep them out of mischief.

"There is no danger now, sir, for you have completely mastered them with your nerve, Captain Lonsdale, and permit me to say, sir, also, that I never in my life saw a greater master than you have shown."

"We are all your slaves, sir," said an old officer who had once held rank in the king's navy.

The Fatal Frigate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN PERIL.

LET me ask the reader to cast a retrospective glance with me, into the lives of some of those who figure in my romance of the "days that tried men's souls."

The scene I would present to them is upon the iron-bound coast of that "nursery of daring seamen," as Maine has been known for many years.

It is at a time two years before the opening of this story, and a small schooner lies at anchor almost within the line of a chain of islands and reefs, which in calmest weather dash back the sea that beats upon them with savage fury.

The vessel flies the English flag, though it now hangs lifeless at the peak, for not a breath of air stirs the waters, and the little craft rolls lazily upon the swell.

The air is hot and oppressive, and awnings have been spread over the decks to keep off the merciless rays of the brazen sun which, though nearing the western horizon, is fierce in its heat.

About the decks amidship and forward loll the men, trying to catch a breath of air, while on the quarter-deck the officers in vain try to sleep and thus forget the intense heat.

Beyond the chain of outer islands, or reefs, for many are nothing more, is a bay of considerable size, with the mainland rising in bold, rugged cliffs, the summits of which are crowned with pines.

Standing upon one of the bold cliffs is a young girl, and her eyes are fixed upon the schooner, distant from her some two miles.

The face of the girl is dark, bronzed by exposure to the weather, it would seem, and yet it is very pure, and tinted with perfect health.

The eyes are black, intensely so, large, and contrary to eyes of large size generally, are very bright and flashing, yet very beautiful and expressive.

Her form is the perfection of graceful outlines, and is clad in a rich garb hardly expected to be seen on one in that wild region, and which was fitting for a grand lady of the times.

But her dark, radiantly beautiful face accorded well with her dress, which was for outdoor exercise, a sun hat, bedecked with ribbons shading her head, and but half-concealing the masses of jet-black hair.

Her hands were gloveless, and upon them were a number of rare jeweled rings, while her wrists were encircled by bracelets of solid gold, and a necklace was about her well-shaped neck.

"That craft is doomed, for there is not a breath of air; and this intense heat indicates a hurricane.

"I can go aboard and save her, and I will." So spoke the maiden, in a voice clear, musical, and yet decided.

Glancing around the sea horizon, she saw afar off a dark mass of clouds rising, and instantly sail:

"I knew it, for there comes the storm." She turned quickly and went back into the pines.

A path well trodden, led her through the border of trees out into an open space where a stone mansion became visible.

It was an old structure, and it bore a neglected look from attic to basement.

Paint had been a stranger to its woodwork for many a long day.

Once it had been a grand old home, but decay seemed to have settled upon it and all its surroundings, for the stables and outhouses in the rear wore the same dismal aspect.

A lawn in front was overgrown with weeds, rose-bushes had grown without care, and the walks were filled with grass.

Independent of the walks, a straight path had been made from the mansion to the pine grove on the cliff, and it had the appearance of having been well traveled.

Along this the maiden walked straight to the piazza steps.

Upon the piazza, in the shade, was swung a ship's hammock, and in it was a man asleep, a book in his hand.

The step of the girl aroused him, and he quickly arose.

He was a man verging on to fifty, tall, well formed, and with the air of a gentlemanly birth and raising.

He had a dark, saturnine face, very cold, very stern, and an eye that was fierce in its expression, while a mustache gave him the look of a foreigner.

He was well-dressed, in knee-breeches, silk stockings, were gem-studded knee and shoe buckles, and fine lace cuffs and shirt bosom, while a jewel glittered in the latter and another of rare beauty on the little finger of his left hand.

That he was the father of the maiden no one could doubt, for they were strangely alike.

Still, for all their finery and jewels they lived in an old stone rookery.

"Well, Lola, you startled me," he said with a smile.

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser, father," she said with a laugh that grated harshly on his ear, for he groaned and replied:

"One cannot fail to be ever on the alert in these times, Lola; but is it not intensely hot?"

"The skies are brazen; but a storm is rising that will soon cool the air."

"I am glad of that."

"And it will wreck a vessel now at anchor off the Spit, if it finds her there."

"Ah! what is the vessel?"

"A schooner-of-war."

"What nationality?"

"English."

"Then let her perish," he said, fiercely.

"No, I will save her."

"You will not, Lola Leslie!" he cried.

"You forget, father, that I am interested in an English man-of-war, now!" she said, with strange significance.

"Ab! that is different," and he threw himself again into the hammock.

Passing on into the mansion the scene within ill-accorded with that without, for there upon all rested an air of real luxury.

There was not the slightest appearance of neglect, the furniture was costly and comfortable, the carpets of the best, and one who beheld the mansion from the outside, and then found themselves within, surrounded by every indication of wealth and refinement, could never believe it to be one and the same place.

Passing along the spacious hallway the girl took from a rack a complete storm-suit, and throwing it across her arm at once left the house going out by a rear door, as though to avoid again meeting her father, for it was nearer by the way she had come.

Upon reaching the cliff she saw that the storm was rising rapidly, and those on the schooner were, as before, seemingly oblivious of danger.

"I will go at once," she said aloud, and taking a path that led around the cliff, she soon reached the shore of a little land-locked cove, in which was a trim little smack at anchor, and upon the beach several skiffs of various sizes.

One of these she pushed into the water, and putting on her storm-coat and hat, seized the oars and sent it rapidly out of the cove, when she headed across the island-dotted bay toward the schooner-of-war.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FAIR PILOT.

With a strong steady stroke she pulled across the waters of the bay.

She seemed to be guided on her way by objects on the land, for she never once looked ahead of her as she rowed, and yet her skill made certain changes of course to avoid dangers in the direct path.

At last she passed out between the line of reefs and came within hailing distance of the schooner.

Her course had been watched by all on board the little vessel-of-war, as something to break the monotony, though no one had suspected that a fair form and lovely face were hidden beneath that storm-coat and tarpaulin.

The sea yet remained like glass, and no air was stirring, though the storm-clouds were sweeping up with great velocity.

"Boat ahoy!" hailed the officer of the deck.

"Ahoi the schooner!" came back in a voice that none had expected to hear.

"That is a boy's voice," said a lieutenant.

"Or a woman's," another replied.

"Do you wish to come aboard?" asked the lieutenant, as the skiff became stationary, the maiden resting upon her oars.

"I came out to pilot you to a safe anchorage, for your vessel will be lost lying where she is."

"Ay, ay, come aboard, please," and the officer stepped to the gangway to meet the volunteer pilot.

"You will have to haul my skiff aboard, for it will be too rough to tow it astern before long, and I advise you, sir, to get your vessel ready to meet a hurricane."

She had thrown off her tarpaulin, as though from the heat, and now stood revealed with her haughty head and radiantly beautiful face visible to all.

"My dear young lady, I had not expected to see so fair a pilot, I assure you, nor did we think we could not ride out a storm here with two good anchors down," said the lieutenant.

"A dozen anchors would not hold you where you now are, sir, when yonder storm strikes you, for it will be no child's play."

"And you can pilot us to safety?" and the lieutenant's manner was anxious now.

"That is what I came for, sir."

"Thank you, I will have the schooner gotten under way at once, for there is a light breeze springing up."

"It is the forerunner of the hurricane, and I never saw uglier clouds," said the young girl, as she glanced seaward.

The lieutenant hastily issued his orders, and then turning to the maiden, said:

"The fact is, miss, our captain lies wounded in his cabin, and we fear fatally so, for we had an action a few days ago with a French brig, which, as we could not expect to whip, we ran from."

"Captain Lonsdale was wounded, as I said, and our surgeon unfortunately killed, so we were hoping to find the home of our captain,

who we know lives somewhere along this coast, that he might be taken there and receive every care."

"Did you say his name was Lonsdale?"

"Yes, young lady."

"Lionel Lonsdale?"

"The same."

"I know him, or rather know of him, and if you will land him at my father's home he will receive every care."

"Indeed, I thank you; but it would hardly be just to leave him at your home, where he may die."

"My father, sir, is skilled in surgery and medicine, and we will give him every care, so do as I say."

The girl was hardly over sixteen, and yet she spoke in a tone almost commanding.

The lieutenant saw her fingers covered with rings of great value, and though her storm-coat covered up her rich attire, he judged that she belonged to a rich family, where his captain would have every comfort.

Then her manner and words were not that of a fisher-girl, as he had at first supposed.

So he said politely:

"As you please, young lady, for you are very kind."

"The captain and the schooner are both in your hands."

She stepped at once to the wheel and as the anchor left the bottom headed the schooner inshore.

The breeze was light and puffy, but was increasing, and the storm came howling along now with a fury that appalled the stoutest heart, when their former danger was thought of.

All could now see the truth of the young girl's words, and they gazed upon her as upon a guardian spirit, while she guided the schooner on her way.

"Do you see yonder island?" she asked, in her terse way of the lieutenant, pointing to the largest island in the bay, and which was covered with a heavy growth of trees, though its precipitous and rocky shores seemed to prevent any one from landing there, even in the calmest weather.

"Yes, young lady."

"I will run under the lee of that until the storm strikes us, for it will be a vast protection, and we will need it."

"I can go up within the schooner's length of the shore."

"And you will not anchor, then?"

"That will be as dangerous an anchorage as outside, where the storm strikes the mainland and the sea rebounds."

"No, I shall run in behind yonder wooded point for an anchorage."

"And there is a haven of safety, miss?"

"Safe as a church," was the brusque reply.

The schooner was now, by the order of the fair pilot, stripped of all sail, and she glided up under the lee of the island just as the storm struck her.

The momentum of the hurricane was terrific, and the wind tore rocks and trees from their hold on the island and sent them flying into the sea, the smaller pines flying along like straws over the deck of the schooner.

The war of the waves as they struck the island sounded like the broadside of a line-of-battle ship.

As it was, the schooner bent under the fearful blast, while the waves rushing around the island swept her decks, and all saw that the little craft would never have lived outside, and perhaps not in the bay, but for the forethought of the bold in breaking the force of the tempest with the island.

"Now set the least particle of sail, she will obey her helm under," said the girl, and it was done, the schooner bounding away like a startled deer under its pressure.

Once away from the lee of the island all felt the full fury of the tempest and trembled for their safety, brave men though they were.

But the fair young pilot was perfectly calm, guided the schooner on her course around the point she had referred to, and into a harbor of perfect safety.

"Now, sir, get your captain into a boat and come ashore with me, for this storm will blow itself out by the time we land," she said in her cool, terse way, simply bowing as the men broke forth in a ringing cheer for their beautiful young pilot.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BACK TO LIFE.

As the young girl, Lola Leslie, had predicted, the fierce storm very soon blew itself out, and, though the sea roared savagely the wind died down to a gentle breeze.

The cove was so thoroughly sheltered by the point of land, which was in the shape of a bent arm, and had an island a few cables' length off the entrance, that the waters there were comparatively still, and there was no trouble in getting the wounded commander into the boat.

He had been wounded by a musket ball, when the schooner and the brig had been at close quarters, and the bullet had penetrated his broad chest.

That the schooner had even escaped capture

The Fatal Frigate.

was a wonder, though the last order of her young captain had saved her, as he had said:

"Aim every gun at her masts! Cut one away and we can escape!"

The next fire of the schooner had cut away the foremast of the brig, and the vessel had managed to slip away from her large enemy, which, in the night, she had taken for an English merchant brig, for at sunset she had shown signals of distress.

"Thus we had been caught, miss," explained the lieutenant, who had told the story of the fight, and how his captain had been wounded.

"He had been unconscious ever since his wound too," he added.

"My father will soon see what can be done for him," answered Lola Leslie, as she stood on the deck of the schooner, waiting for the young commander to be brought on deck.

"You live near here then, miss?"

"Yes, just beyond those pines on the cliff."

"Is there no village, or town near?"

"A few miles inland there is a village."

"Your father is a farmer there?"

"He has his farm, but does not cultivate it, more than for food for ourselves and the cattle."

"Ah! a doctor then?"

"No, he studied medicine but never practices."

"My father is a gentleman."

"Ah!" and the lieutenant knew not what to say, but after a moment asked:

"And you know Captain Lonsdale then?"

"I met him a year ago, when I was at school in Portland."

"I was supposed to be rich, and I was kidnapped one evening, when returning to the boarding school from the house of a friend I had been visiting."

"I was unable to cry out, or resist, for three men had seized me, and were bearing me down toward the shore where they had a boat."

"A person saw them, came to my rescue, killed one of my kidnappers and wounded another, the third making his escape."

"I had not fainted, for I am not that kind, and I saw that he took big chances to save one he knew nothing about."

"He escorted me to my school, left me with a bow, and reported the affair to the town authorities."

"I learned the next day that my rescuer was Lieutenant Lionel Lonsdale, whose vessel was then in port; but he sailed that night and I have never seen him since, but I should know him, as I saw him in the broad glare of the hall at school, though but for a moment."

"Still I remember his face perfectly—yes, that is the one who rescued me," and she turned her gaze upon the pale face of the wounded officer, as he was just then brought on deck on a litter.

Her skiff had already been launched, and springing into it she led the way to the landing, the schooner's boat following with the lieutenant and the men who were to bear him up to Bleak Castle as the owner named his home.

Just as the little party left the pines, the master of Bleak Castle came out of his front door upon the piazza, evidently anxious regarding his daughter, whose intention to pilot the schooner into a safe anchorage had escaped his mind, until he discovered that she was not in the house.

Knowing that the storm was of greater violence than usual, he had hastened out to see what had become of her, when he saw the party issue from the pines.

"Thank Heaven the reckless girl is safe; but what the deuce has she there?" he said quickly, and he did not advance to meet her.

But seeing her father she hastened on ahead, and running up the piazza, said quickly:

"Father, I ran the schooner into the cove anchoring, and have brought her commander ashore, for he is severely, perhaps fatally wounded."

"Lola Leslie, in the name of the saints, what did you do that for?"

"He shall go back this instant!" and his eyes flashed with anger.

"Then I go too."

"What! have you gone mad?"

"No, father, I am as sane as you are; but that wounded man is Captain Lionel Lonsdale, who saved me from those men who kidnapped me, and you know who they were, and what my fate would have been."

"Hal say you so, girl?"

"Yes, father."

"He is that gallant young captain of whom so much has been said, and who left you before you could thank him?"

"He is, father, and I fear he is dying."

"He shall be well cared for, child, God knows, so run into the house and have Clarice prepare the south spare room for him, as it is the largest and best, and—but here they are."

"Lieutenant Noland, this is my father, Mr. Leslie, and he wishes to tell you how welcome will be Captain Lonsdale in our home."

The lieutenant was given a kindly greeting by the master of Bleak Castle, and the officer had begun to fear, from the appearance of things outside, that Captain Lonsdale would get but cold comfort there.

But when he had entered the house he began

to change his mind, and upon taking the wounded officer into the splendidly-furnished and large room that was to be his, he was sure that he had made a mistake.

"You can dismiss your men, sir, for I have servants here to look after Captain Lonsdale; but I beg you to remain to-night, and I can then give you my opinion as to his recovery or not," said Mr. Leslie, with stately courtesy.

The lieutenant bowed and accepted the invitation, and a foreign-looking servant in livery showed him to a room to adjust his toilet before supper.

Half an hour after, when he entered the spacious sitting-room, he found Lola there, dressed as a king's daughter might be, and she asked him to be seated, adding:

"My father found and extracted the bullet, and the captain seems better since, and there is hope of his recovery."

Mr. Leslie just then came in, and said:

"Lieutenant Noland, your captain will live, I am assured, though the wound is as near fatal as can be and not prove so."

"Join me, sir, in a little brandy as an appetizer for supper."

The lieutenant assented, and the supper was one of the best he had ever sat down to, and the service was of solid silver.

"I would be wounded myself to enjoy this luxury," he mused, while he continued:

"And to be near that lovely girl, though I'm afraid of her, and I guess she's a spitfire."

The next morning Captain Lonsdale had shown a decided change for the better, and as the schooner was upon special service, Lieutenant Noland decided to sail at once and return for his commander in a few weeks' time, and he so told his host.

The schooner, accordingly, set sail, Lola Leslie running her out to sea, and returning in her skiff.

It was six weeks before the schooner Tartar again came in sight of Bleak Castle, and she stood off and on until her signal for a pilot in was seen and answered.

Then it was Lola Leslie that went out in her skiff and brought the schooner once more into the cove.

"And Captain Lonsdale, Miss Leslie?" he asked, vaguely, as she stepped on deck.

"Is well, he says, and will sail with you, for he saw the schooner from his window."

And the next day Lionel Lonsdale departed from Bleak Castle, but he carried the heart of Lola, his devoted nurse, with him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PIRATE.

WHEN the little packet schooner set sail from port, her skipper, Captain Amos Caldwell, was anxious to make his fair passenger feel at home, and he accordingly brought forward his wife and two children, and presented them to Eve Lonsdale.

Eve was a girl of noble impulses, and not one to snub a person who was not her equal, and she shook hands with the pleasant-faced wife of the skipper, and kissed the two very pretty children.

This won the heart at once of the skipper and his wife, and the former promptly went to the caboose and interviewed the negro cook.

"I declare to gracious, Toby, that is the sweetest ledd; I ever seen, barring my Ellen, and I want you to spread yourself with the table fixin's, and don't mind expense," he said.

"Yas, Massa Cap'n, I'll jist do my best, fer she do 'pear ter be sweeter than Ole Verginy honey, down whar I was riz, an' sh' jist smiled a bow at me awful nice, sah, when I seen her come aboard."

"I'll do my best, sah, sart'in."

And Toby did do his best, and to an extent that caused Eve to feel that with her pleasant state-room, the neat, well supplied table, and the genial skipper, his wife and children, the voyage would be a pleasant one.

As they swept out of the harbor she enjoyed the beauties of the scenery about her, and was really sorry to be called down to supper.

But Toby's triumph in the culinary art repaid her, and she was glad she had not said, as she was half-tempted to do, that she had dined late and did not care for supper.

Returning on deck she glanced about her and her eyes were the first to fall upon a distant sail.

"Captain, what is that vessel lying so still off yonder for, and under bare poles?"

"You have sharp eyes to see that craft; now I do declar' to gracious."

"She's lying away off there toward sunrise, and the haze half hides her."

"She's a fisherman, I guess."

"That craft is too large for a fisherman, Captain Caldwell, and her masts are tall as a vessel-of-war."

"You are right, miss, and I do declar' to gracious he is sttin' sal."

"He is indeed, sir, and I would give any such suspicious looking craft a wide berth, if I was in your place."

"I'll do it, miss, and not stand out further, as I meant ter do."

"No, I'll head easterly now, by north, and

keep the coast nigh me, for I don't like suspicious looking crafts myself."

"Have you a glass, sir?"

The glass was gotten by one of the children and handed to Eve, who after a short look through it, said quietly:

"Look, please, Captain Caldwell, for that is an armed craft, and her looks indicate either a privateer or—a pirate!"

"Well I want to know," and the skipper leveled his glass.

But only for an instant and then he said quickly:

"I declar' to gracious I'll just run away from that feller, for he looks ugly, now he does."

"Come, mates, set the finery on the Pretty Ellen, for she's got to show what she can do, and I guess as how she can do it too."

"You found your schooner fast on your way down from your home, captain?" said Eve, in an inquiring way, and there was just a shade of anxiety in her tone.

"She walked by all we came up with, miss, and it seems to me she can go pretty peert."

"I am glad of it, sir, for that schooner is in clare, you see."

"You is a born sailor, miss, for I declar' to gracious you're right."

"He's an ugly chap too, with a rusty look and patched sails, but I've seen some awful homely gals as was spry dancers, and the same holds good, miss, with vessels; but that feller does sail," and the skipper watched the stranger attentively.

As the Pretty Ellen now had all her lower sails set, she was making rapid progress and leaving a clean wake.

But Eve was watching both craft with the eye of a thorough seaman, and she said to the skipper:

"We were holding our own, captain, but he has set his topsails, you see, and is gaining upon us."

"Again you're right, miss."

"Ho, mates, up with the Pretty Ellen's caps, for she needs 'em bad."

In answer the crew sent up the topsails and it was not long before Eve reported that the Pretty Ellen was once more gaining.

The night was near at hand now, and Eve, in glancing about, sighted the brig coming out of the harbor.

"That looks like a vessel-of-war, from her rig, and she is evidently in chase of the schooner, Captain Caldwell, so that we have nothing to fear," she said.

For awhile it seemed so, but Eve's keen eyes soon noticed the unsteady manner in which the brig sailed, as also that she failed to make as good speed as the schooner.

This she observed with regret, for she had become convinced in her own mind that the schooner was a pirate, as she did not look like a French privateer, and no English war-craft would pursue a vessel out of a British port.

Seeing that the brig would be of no service to them, Eve made known her suspicion to Captain Caldwell, and begged him to do all in his power to urge the Pretty Ellen on in her flight.

He had now become alarmed himself, for he had with him all he had dear in the world.

True, in the little seaport town on the Kennebec, from whence he sailed, he had a snug little home all paid for; but all the rest of his worldly goods were invested in the Pretty Ellen, and on board of her were his wife and children.

With his half-dozen in crew, which included Toby and the boy, he could offer no resistance, and he must depend wholly upon the speed of his schooner.

Nor did the fine craft intend to disappoint him, it seened, as she slowly gained upon her pursuer,

"If he does not use his guns, captain, we are safe," said Eve.

"But are we in range, miss?" asked Mrs. Caldwell, who had just come out of the cabin, having put her two little daughters to bed.

"Oh yes, we are in range, but he does not seem to wish to fire so near port, as it would bring a man-of-war out after him and that makes me believe he is an outlaw," said Eve.

"We will run away from her, miss, I declar' to gracious we will."

"If he does not fire on us and cripple the Pretty Ellen, we will."

But, as Eve spoke a flash came from the bows of the pursuer, illuminating the gathering darkness for an instant, and then came the whir of a solid shot as it flew over the Pretty Ellen and sank into the sea a cable's length beyond.

"A well-aimed shot that was," said Eve, calmly, while Mrs. Caldwell gave a cry of alarm, and then Toby darted into the caboose in terror.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FATAL SHOT.

THE vessel that was in chase of the Pretty Ellen was the same that had chased the brig into port, whose captain had told his story to Commodore Vernon, Belle, and the gallant young major.

It will be remembered that the Belle of Blue Water was not a match, in her crude fit-out, for

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the schooner, or the Pretty Ellen, and seeing the latter outfoot the former in such a nimble way, the major had put back.

The firing from the pursuer had begun, when those on board saw that the Pretty Ellen would escape them.

The armed vessel was a pretty craft, as far as her model and rig went, but her hull was really weather-beaten, her bulwarks scarred by innumerable shot-wounds, her decks seamed by iron-lail that had fallen upon her, and her canvas in a torn and patched condition.

She had a crew of some fifty men, and a wild-looking set they were, capable, if appearances went for anything, of cuttin' a throat or scuttling a ship with pleasure.

Her armament was in good condition, and heavy for a vessel of her size, while a pivot-gun mounted upon the forecastle looked like a very long, savage deadly weapon.

The schooner had been sailing eastward when she had sighted the brig Gay Betty, and chased her into port, and in spite of her dilapidated condition she would have captured her had the race been a few leagues longer, although the merchant craft was a good sailor.

Lowering his sails, the schooner's captain had lain in the offing, hoping to catch some vessel running out or in, when night came on, and the Pretty Ellen had gratified him by running out, and at once he had given chase, when he saw, by her change of course, that he had been sighted.

On the deck of the armed schooner stood three persons, who were officers.

One of these was a man of thirty-five, with a face that was sinister, yet by no means homely.

He looked just the man to be the commander of a pirate crew, and his dress was that of a coxcomb, for he seemed to be very careful with his toilet, and was decked out in a shiny uniform that was gorgeous enough for an admiral of the Spanish Navy.

His two companions were as different from each other as daylight and darkness.

One was a stout, bronze-faced Englishman, with a strangely jovial countenance for a cut-throat, and whose uniform was neither gorgeous nor tidy.

The other was a young man with a stamp of refinement upon every feature, though there was a reckless, devil-I-care expression hovering about his handsome mouth, that somewhat marred his otherwise very good-looking countenance.

His form was elegant, his movements quick, yet graceful, and his uniform neat and plain.

"That schooner is just what I want, in place of this craft, which cannot last much longer," said the gorgeously uniformed captain, speaking with the accent of a Cuban, as his looks indicated him to be.

"She is faster than the Spitsfire, that is certain," replied the young officer, while he of the jovial face rejoined:

"The Spitsfire is old now, her sails are in no condition, and her hull is water-logged."

"True, English, but yonder craft stands up well under this breeze, as you see, and she could be made to carry a third more sail, for she has on a merchant rig, and with a cruiser's canvas she can walk away from the Spitsfire, yes, even in her best days."

"Don't kick the bridge that has carried you safely over the stream, Captain Cutlass," the one addressed as English said.

"Curse the craft, ay, and all else, when no longer useful."

"Yonder schooner suits me, and I shall have her."

"She is within range, sir."

"I know that, English, but I am too near yonder port to fire, as there may be cruisers there to run out after me; but what that brig came for I do not know."

"I sincerely hope, Captain Cutlass, that you will not fire on yonder schooner, or, in fact, capture any craft in these immediate waters," said the younger officer.

"I shall do as I deem best, Lieutenant Harold," was the sharp reply.

"You remember my compact with you, captain."

"Bah! that was a year ago."

"It still holds good, though."

"No, I do not recognize it."

"I do not think, sir, because you are a pirate captain, you should forget that you owe me your life, for but that I saved you, you would have been strung up at the yard-arm."

The Cuban turned quickly, and his face lighted up with a smile, as he said:

"My dear Senor Harold, I have not forgotten that when I sprung on board the clipper ship, of which you were ta'rd mate, and my schooner shot ahead before the grapnels could catch, that you, seeing I was alone, prevented your men from cutting me down, and a cruiser coming in sight put my vessel to flight, thereby leaving me a prisoner on board."

"I have not forgotten that you took pity upon me, as I lay in irons, being borne to a port where my life would have been, as you say, forfeited at the yard-arm, for my piracies, and that you released me, allowing me to escape as simply an act of mercy upon your part."

"Nor have I forgotten, Senor Harold, that I captured a coasting schooner the next year, on

which you were first mate, and that I spared your life for the service done me in the past."

"You were poor, and a homeless wanderer you told me, and I made you my first lieutenant, and the compact between us was that I was not to cruise in northern seas."

"But, my dear senor, necessity knows no law, keeps no compacts, and, as I have almost a sinking schooner under me, but half a crew, and the cruisers have driven me from West Indian waters, I have come up into these northern waters to better myself, and, as yonder schooner suits me, I shall capture her."

"Lieutenant English, get that forecastle gun ready and open fire on yonder schooner, as soon as it grows dark."

The captain turned away from the handsome young officer as he spoke, as though to say that he would hear no more, and soon after he gave the order to fire.

With the first shot of the gun the chase was seen to change her course and to head in toward the land.

"She is seeking some hiding-place inshore; but she shall not escape me."

"Keep up your fire, Mr. English," called out the pirate captain, and again and again the pivot gun sent its solid shot flying after the Pretty Ellen, until at last a wild cheer from the buccaneer crew showed that the flying packet schooner had been hard hit, for she was suddenly seen to come to.

"She is mine," said Captain Cutlass in a triumphant tone, while Lieutenant Harold gave a deep sigh of regret.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE PRIZE.

WHEN Skipper Caldwell found that the pirate was firing upon him, he held a hasty consultation, and the one he consulted was Eve Lonsdale, for her cool courage and opinions had deeply impressed him.

"If we go on as we are, miss, he may cripple us and run us down, with his all-fired shootin', and I declar' to gracious that would be prime bad."

"But in that bay yonder are a small town, and if we could reach it, the town folks would help us fight him off."

"Now what do you say, miss, for I declar' to gracious I want to know?"

"I would run for the town, Captain Caldwell, as it is the best that can be done," was the reply.

So the Pretty Ellen was put away for the little town on the coast, and instantly it was seen that the pirate followed her.

And more, he kept up a more rapid fire, and seemed determined to cripple the chase.

The firing however did not bring the Pretty Ellen to.

Her skipper was a brave man, and took the helm himself, while he sent his wife below.

But Eve would not retire to the cabin, simply saying that she preferred to remain on deck, and the skipper noticed that she did not flinch as the shot flew over them.

In fact he was glad to have her there, for she gave confidence to himself and the crew.

Toby had gone below decks to the store-room, when the firing began, and so far he had forgotten to return; but the crew crouched forward, watching the swift sailing of the schooner, and waiting for whatever might turn up.

They were glad to see that they were still out-footing the suspicious looking craft in their rear, and must soon be out of range.

This Captain Cutlass realized, and so he sent forward his young lieutenant, who was a splendid heavy-gun shot, to fire on the Pretty Ellen.

For some reason Lieutenant Harold did not maintain his reputation, for his shots flew wild, and in anger Captain Cutlass himself went forward.

"In another mile our shots will not reach her, so she must be crippled," he said, as he sighted the gun.

After several shots he got perfect range, and the result was that the solid shot passed close over the heads of Skipper Caldwell and Eve, and, as a luff was made under pressure of a flaw of wind, the bowsprit of the Pretty Ellen was cut off close to the bows.

The result was that the schooner was instantly at the mercy of the pirate, who kept up now a warm fire, which cut away the fore-topmast and killed two of the crew as they were trying to repair damage.

As the Pretty Ellen remained motionless the pirate craft ceased firing and Skipper Caldwell said dolefully:

"It's all up with me now, miss."

"So it seems, sir; but I hope you will not lose your beautiful vessel."

"It's kind o' you, miss, to think o' me, when you may be in more trouble, I declar' to gracious it is; but we'll soon know, I guess."

The pirate now came rapidly down upon the Pretty Ellen, passed to leeward, and going about came slowly up toward her under shortened sail.

"Ahoy that schooner!" hailed Captain Cutlass.

"Ahoy!" responded Captain Caldwell, dolefully.

"Who, and what are you?"

"The packet schooner Pretty Ellen, bound to Portland."

"I will board you."

"Stand by to make a line fast as I come alongside."

"I'll not do it," was the flat rejoinder, and the skipper turned to Eve and said:

"I ain't goin' to help him capture my craft, miss, I declar' to gracious I ain't."

In spite of her anxiety Eve smiled, and then she watched the pirate as he slowly neared the Pretty Ellen.

"As you would not have a line, take the grapnels, then," shouted Captain Cutlass, and the grapnels were thrown with a heavy clang.

A moment after the pirate captain and a score of his men bounded upon the deck of the packet.

"Well, sir, what damage have I done your vessel?" he said, sternly.

"More than you'll pay for, I declar' to gracious; but who and what are you, for you look a pirit all over!" said Skipper Caldwell.

"I am a pirate, sir, and this vessel is my prize."

"Who have you as passengers and what is your freight?"

"I have mostly provision for up the country stores, with a few boxes o' nicknacks, and such."

"My passengers is this lady and my wife and children, whom you nigh scared into fits," answered Skipper Caldwell, for Eve had whispered to him that he had better not be uncivil, as the man looked dangerous.

"Well, we'll get little that is of value from your cargo, otherwise than having a good feed; but your craft is just what I want, for my schooner is used up."

"Now, to see what your passengers can do in the way of ransom," and he turned to Eve, whom now for the first time he seemed to regard.

"I have but little money with me, sir, and a few jewels; but you can have them."

"Ah! what a lovely face."

"You are indeed a prize worth capturing," and the pirate leader stepped quickly toward Eve, who stood where the light from the cabin through the companionway fell upon her, and the battle lanterns held by half a dozen of the pirate crew also revealed her distinctly to the view of all.

With a cry of alarm Eve shrunk back, but the pirate captain still advanced, until suddenly a form stepped between him and the frightened girl.

"Hold on, Captain Cutlass, for I will defend that lady with my life," came in a low, earnest voice, and the speaker leveled a pistol at the breast of the outlaw.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

EVE'S DEFENDER.

CAPTAIN CUTLASS started back at the bold words addressed to him, and a cry of rage broke from his lips, as he saw who the defender of the maiden was.

He however saw also that the pistol, held in the hand of her defender, covered his heart, and a firm finger was upon the trigger.

Now Captain Cutlass was a brave man, in spite of his crimes, and, caught in the toils, as he was, he was not one to call upon his crew to extricate him, and thus give them a hold upon him.

So he said calmly, after an instant of silence:

"Lieutenant Harold, you have seen fit to usurp my place here, sir."

"No, I merely say that I will kill you, before you shall touch that lady with your guilty hand."

"I am chief here, sir, and the lady is my prize."

"So fair a face should bring a heavy ransom, and I will hold her as my captive until I get gold from her friends to restore her."

"You are talking, Senor Capitan, under the muzzle of my revolver," was the significant retort.

"I am talking to one whom I have befriended, and whom I made what you are."

"This is your gratitude."

"You are talking to me, senor, who took pity upon you, when a prisoner, saved you from the hangman, and, captured afterward by you was forced to serve you as an officer; but that is not the question, sir, for you must let that lady go free, or I will defend her with my life."

"Ha! say you so, senor?"

"Then you shall have the opportunity, if you will take the cutlass instead of that pistol."

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"You mean no treachery?"

"No."

"You will fight me with the cutlass for the freedom of this lady, and the release of this vessel and cargo, just as it is, for your compact with me, when I became your lieutenant, was that you would never cruise above the Carolinas."

"I will fight you, senor, for the lady, and the vessel, if so you will," was the rejoinder, and the pirate captain smiled, but it was a wicked smile.

"So be it, senor, you wear your cutlass, and I have mine; but, while I hold you under cover of my pistol, I shall see to it that you are disarmed, for Senor Cutlass, you are as treacherous as a snake."

"Skipper, pray take that man's pistols from his belt."

Skipper Caldwell wanted to do as asked, but he feared the pirate crew grouped about him, and so replied:

"I declar' to gracious I'd like to oblige yer, straunger, but I are the only one left o' my father's family."

"Permit me to disarm the pirate, sir."

It was Eve Lonsdale that spoke, and she stepped quickly forward and removed the two pistols from the belt of the pirate, whose savage oath at her act did not affect her in the least.

"Now, lady, take my pistols also," said Lieutenant Harold.

"Thank you," he added, as he quickly drew his cutlass and faced Captain Cutlass who already had his weapon drawn.

What the Cuban pirate's real name was no one knew on board that vessel; but he had received the name of "Captain Cutlass" from the fact of his wearing a gold-hilted weapon of that description, and which he wielded with wonderful skill.

He had never yet crossed blades with one he could not conquer, and so he felt happy in the affair between his bold lieutenant and himself being left to Cutlass to decide.

His men knew his skill also, and they seemed to feel that it was a foregone conclusion that their captain would easily kill their lieutenant, and there was not one who did not wish that it would be otherwise, for Captain Cutlass was cruel and brutal to his crew at all times, while on the contrary the handsome sub-officer had been ever polite and kind, caring for the wounded, nursing the sick, and when on duty never forcing double duty upon them.

As for Lieutenant English, he of the jovial face, he was too lazy to take much interest in anything.

He had been captured by the Cuban, when a passenger on a vessel bound to Jamaica, and had given a large sum for his ransom, and then was kept a prisoner, taking the position of officer to keep from going below decks in irons, for he had been a midshipman in the English Navy, and so told his captor.

He consequently hated Captain Cutlass, as much as one of his jovial nature could hate any one, and he prayed intently that Harold might kill him, though he saw no hope of his doing so.

With a swoop of his cutlass the Cuban cleared a space about him and sprung to the attack.

But it was met with a skill that seemed to disconcert him, and those who had expected to see Harold cut down, breathed more freely.

Looking over the bulwarks Lieutenant English muttered:

"I believe my prayer is to be answered."

"I declar' to gracious he scared me with that spring and sweep o' steel; but he didn't skeer ther young feller fer nothin'," said the skipper to Eve, whose face now lost its anxious expression, for among her accomplishments, she had been taught to fence by her brother, and she saw at once that the pirate chief had met his match in his lieutenant, and knew it too.

CHAPTER XL.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

THE livid face of Captain Cutlass showed his amazement and fury that he had not at one sweep cut down his adversary, who had dared to face him with a weapon that he considered himself master of.

Instead of making him more cautious, he became reckless in his determination to kill his daring lieutenant, and he pressed him with a savage earnestness that was terrific.

But Harold met the attack with a composure that nothing seemed to overcome, and a skill that completely set at defiance the splendid skill of his foe.

Then the Cuban changed his tactics, and began to fight slowly and with studied skill in every action.

He was met in the same cool way, until he suddenly began to act on the defensive.

Instantly Harold lowered his weapon and stepped back, while he asked:

"Are you tired of the combat, Senor Cutlass?"

"No; why did you not press me?" yelled the Cuban.

"That will come in good time, sir, unless you yield your claim now upon that lady and this schooner."

"Never, sir! I yield only in death!"

"Here's at you!"

With the last words he again sprung to the attack, and with a maneuver different from any of his former ones.

But he was again foiled, and it caused a bitter curse to escape his lips as he saw that his adversary still faced him.

Pressing forward with a ferocity that showed he was mad with hatred of his lieutenant, he for a few steps drove Harold backward, and all held their breath with suspense, but seeing that he was almost against Eve, where she stood by the taffrail, the young officer said, in a low tone:

"Pardon, lady, and have no fear; he is at my mercy."

As though to prove his words, Harold at once began to act on the offensive, and Captain Cutlass was forced to give ground.

Step by step he was forced back until, suddenly, by a skillful movement, the sword-arm of the pirate chief was struck upward, and, quick as a flash, there came a sweeping downward cut of Harold's blade, and a cry escaped the livid lips of the Cuban, while his blade fell with a clang upon the deck.

For an instant all seemed to feel that the corsair had only been disarmed.

Then came a cry of horror from Eve, followed by the words:

"See! he has cut his hand off at the wrist!"

The Cuban staggered back against the bulwark, while he groaned, as he held up the stump of his right arm:

"You have done for me!"

"Yes, and had the lady not disarmed you as I asked, you would return the compliment for me."

"Ho! English, you are a surgeon, I believe; stop the bleeding of that arm, and Captain Cutlass may yet live to repent of his crimes."

The young officer spoke in the calmest manner possible, while the Cuban, with another bitter oath, ran to English for aid, for death stared him in the face he well knew, unless something was done, and quickly to stanch the flowing life-stream.

"Men, I have won this little battle, so return on board your vessel," said Harold to the crew of the pirate schooner.

But the men hesitated, and one said:

"Lieutenant, our schooner hain't worth much, and we need a new craft, sir."

"We'll give our old one to the skipper, and let the young lady go, but we wants the schooner."

"I fear you cannot expect more of them, sir, and trouble may follow," said Eve, addressing Harold.

But the young officer had the look of one who meant not to be bullied by the crew, and he was about to reply, when suddenly a shrill voice called out:

"Ship ahoy!"

It was the cabin-boy of the Pretty Ellen, and all eyes were turned out over the waters.

At once a cry of alarm arose from the crew of the pirate schooner, for there, not a quarter of a mile distant, was a large vessel

In the excitement on the deck of the Pretty Ellen, no one had seen the stranger approaching, and she had evidently come from in-shore behind a point of land, beyond which lay the village that Skipper Caldwell had been heading for.

To escape, the pirates knew would be impossible, and then Skipper Caldwell, who

had turned his glass upon the stranger, added terror to all by the cry:

"It is the Fatal Frigate! Now sure, somebody's got to die!"

CHAPTER XLI.

MERCIFUL.

WHEN the cry of a sail was heard, Captain Cutlass was in his cabin, having his arm dressed by his lieutenant, who had been an apothecary in England after leaving the navy, and was by no means a bad surgeon.

The pirate chief was very weak from loss of blood, and now, brought face to face with death, without the excitement of combat, was very nervous, and asked over and over again:

"Will I die, English, will I die?"

"You may, Captain Cutlass, and in that case you will not be hanged!" was the reply of English, who, now having his savage commander at his mercy, could not refrain from giving him a dig.

"Ah! if I can only live for revenge, how happy will I be," groaned the pirate leader.

"I think the chances are in your favor, I must say, for I have picked up the arteries and veins, and I do not believe more hemorrhage will follow."

"But you must keep quiet, captain, very quiet, not excite yourself, leave the command of the schooner to Lieutenant Harold, and you may yet live to be hanged."

"You shall command, not he."

"You are not on duty now, sir, and he is the ranking officer, and after I have seen what he can do, I am not the one to oppose him."

"No, Captain Cutlass, let all go on as it should."

"What on earth is all that row on deck about?" cried the Cuban.

"I wish you would go and see, for something is wrong."

"Don't worry, captain, for if anything is wrong Harold will set it right—hello!"

At the last word Lieutenant English looked up quickly, as two pirates bounded into the cabin.

"We're hanged!"

"The schooner's captured!"

"What is it, you devils?" roared Cutlass.

"There is a frigate right on top of us!"

"Yes, sir, and it's the Fatal Frigate!"

All had heard of the Fatal Frigate, for her ill fortune had spread from sea to sea, during the few years since she was launched, and superstition regarding her held full sway in many minds.

It was said by sailor, to meet her at sea was a sure sign of the loss of their vessel, while others maintained that if the Fatal Frigate crossed their path at sea, death would follow in her wake.

So the announcement that a vessel-of-war was upon them, by one of the pirates, did not cause the dread in the minds of the Cuban and his lieutenant, that did the words of the other that it was the Fatal Frigate.

"Go on deck, English, for God's sake, and see what it means!" said the pirate leader.

"For the devil's sake, rather," muttered the lieutenant, as he tremblingly obeyed, and in his alarm, moved with more alacrity than was his wont.

Upon reaching the deck he saw that the frigate was within a cable's-length from them, her guns were out, her crew at quarters, and that she was coming up into the wind to lay to, preparatory to sending boats aboard, for her commander seemed to have taken in the situation of affairs at a glance.

"My brother's frigate! Now we are saved!" he heard Eve cry joyously.

"And we are hanged," muttered English, as he gazed sorrowfully upon the scene.

"Schooners ahoy! Who and what are you?" came in the clear tones of Lionel Lonsdale.

"The Pretty Ellen, packet schooner, Portland bound, and a piit that has taken us, I declar' to gracious!" responded Captain Caldwell.

"Ay, ay! I will send a boat aboard."

"Come aboard yerself, Captain Lonsdale, for there's some one as wants to see you bad," was the response that surprised Lionel Lonsdale.

"Ay, ay! I will board you."

And five minutes after Captain Lonsdale sprung upon the deck of the Pretty Ellen,

while behind him came two boat-loads of seamen, armed to the teeth.

"Brother!"

As she uttered the word, Eve advanced toward him.

"Eve, my sister! you here?" and he sprung forward and greeted her.

"Yes, Leo; I went in search of you, found you had sailed, so came as passenger back to Portland, when we were chased by this pirate schooner and captured, after he had crippled us."

"Indeed! this is fortunate for me, and you, too, dear sister, for something, I found, was the matter with the water in the frigate's casks, and I put in shore yesterday to get a fresh supply."

"I was just on my way East, when we heard firing, ran down this way and sighted you."

"But who is the pirate captain that I have to hang?" and Lionel Lonsdale glanced about him.

"I suppose that I am in command now, sir, as my chief is wounded," and Lieutenant Harold stepped forward.

"Put that man in irons and every one else on the outlaw schooner," was the stern command.

"One moment, brother, and hear me, for whatever sin this young man may be guilty of, he now deserves your mercy, for he has just wounded his captain in defending me."

"Ah! I am glad to hear this of you, sir, but sorry to see you an officer upon a pirate deck."

"I am sorry to be here, sir, but circumstances often compel a man to do that which he abhors."

"That is true; but what pirate craft is this?"

"The Spitsfire, under Captain Cutlass."

"Ah! this is a valuable capture, for I know that Cuban corsair of old."

"Can you give an account of yourself, sir?"

"Simply that I was mate of a merchant vessel, that Captain Cutlass boarded, and his men could not follow him, as we drifted apart, so he became a prisoner."

"He was wounded, and feeling sorry for him, when he told me his story, I aided him to escape."

"Some time after he captured a vessel on which I was a mate, and I was forced to serve him as an officer, and have had no chance to better my condition."

"He pledged me his word that he would not cruise above the Carolinas, but he has done so, captured this schooner to-night, and I defended that lady, sir, who it seems is your sister, from his insults."

"That is my story, sir."

"You are an American?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your manner and words indicate that you were reared a gentleman."

"I was, sir; but of my past I do not care to speak."

"I was captured on a pirate vessel, as an officer, so I am your prisoner, to hang at the yard-arm, if so you please; and perhaps it were best that I end my life thus."

He spoke with reckless bitterness that touched both Lionel Lonsdale and his sister, and the former said:

"You are free, sir, for the service you have rendered to my sister, and your story I take as truth."

"Now, what of your chief?"

"I severed his hand at the wrist in my cutlass combat with him, so he is badly wounded."

"Of his antecedents you appear to be informed."

"You must be a superb swordsman, sir, to do that."

"I am skilled in the use of blades, sir," was the modest reply.

"And your other officers?"

"I rank next to Captain Cutlass, and then comes a jolly good fellow, English, we call him, as he is an Englishman, and like myself, he is an enforced officer."

"Then to him I shall be merciful, but to your crew?"

"There they are, sir, and I believe they would rather be honest seamen than pirates."

"Or be hanged. But how many have you?"

"Half a hundred, sir."

"I will send them on board the frigate in

irons, and if I can make honest seamen out of them, will do so; but your captain will have to hang, if your wound has not finished him."

"He is tough, sir, and English has him in hand and is a good surgeon, so he may live to be hanged."

"We shall see; but what is your schooner worth?"

"Almost a wreck she is, sir, and Captain Cutlass meant to take this craft and scuttle his own."

"And your booty?"

"Is valuable, sir; while, if docked and repaired, the Spitsfire would make a good cruiser, for she is comparatively new, only scarred up and leaking."

"Thank you, sir; but will you get your men together, and I will send them on board the frigate," and turning to the skipper of the Pretty Ellen, Lonsdale said:

"Now, captain, what can I do for you?"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ILL OMEN AND HER PRIZE.

IN answer to the question addressed to him by Captain Lonsdale, Skipper Caldwell jumped as though he had been shot.

Then he collected himself together, and said, with a bow, in which he doffed his hat:

"Captaining, I declar' to gracious you have done more for me now than I deserve, for I saves my vessel, though it do look as though I were going to lose my sweet lady passenger," and he looked at Eve.

"Yes, captain, as I am going directly to the vicinity of my home, I shall carry my sister on the frigate; but the passage money will not be asked of you."

"Now, captaining, you gits my mad up to talk in that way, for hain't you saved me my vessel, and what has a leetle passage-money got to do ag'in' that?"

"I declar' to gracious, you r'iles me!"

"Well, captain, we will not quarrel, I assure you, for you have taken good care of my sister; and as this pirate has cut away your bowsprit for you, and killed two of your men, if you see anything on board his craft you would like as a souvenir of to-night, you are at liberty to take it."

"Now you is kind, captaining; but I guesses the memory o' him that I will have will be enough and more than I wants."

"But I thanks you, sir, all the same, I declar' to gracious I does, and Ellen and the little gals will pray for you in every prayer."

"Indeed we will, sir, for you have saved us from ruin, perhaps more," said Mrs. Caldwell, with deep emotion.

"And yet I command the Fatal Frigate," said Lonsdale, with a smile.

"She has proven fatal to the Spitsfire at least, sir, and that is the name she has," remarked Harold.

"True; and she shall be fatal to others," was the significant remark.

After seeing that the pirate crew were being transferred to the frigate, Lionel Lonsdale left his sister with Mrs. Caldwell, while he set a number of his crew to rigging a new bowsprit on the Pretty Ellen.

Then he made a tour of the Spitsfire, and satisfying himself that the vessel would make a good cruiser if refitted and repaired, he decided that he would send her into port.

Going into the cabin of the pirate vessel, he discovered Captain Cutlass and English seated there.

The pirate chief lay back on pillows, and was very pale, while his lieutenant was bandaging his wound.

"Well, sir, you are Captain Cutlass, of the buccaneer schooner Spitsfire?"

"I am," was the low reply.

"Your wound prevents me from swinging you at once to the yard-arm, as you certainly deserve, and also from treating you harshly by placing you in irons."

"You can remain in your cabin, sir, under guard, until I decide what I will do with you."

The Cuban Corsair bowed, but made no reply.

"And you, sir," continued Lonsdale, turning to English, "are, I believe, a pirate lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir, through necessity; at present, however, a surgeon," and English smiled with the utmost coolness.

"When you finish dressing the wound of your pirate chief, go on board of my frigate and report as surgeon, for you are just the man I wish."

English was astounded, but bowed low in thanks, and rapidly completing his task, went on deck.

Leaving a seaman to guard Captain Cutlass Lonsdale returned to the Pretty Ellen, and called to his sister to accompany him on board the frigate.

She bade farewell to Mrs. Caldwell and the skipper, and soon after entered the cabin of the Ill Omen.

Both Harold and English had been told by Lonsdale to go in the boat with them, and upon reaching the vessel, after having conducted Eve into the cabin, the young captain said:

"Mr. Manly, I found my sister a passenger on the packet that had been captured by the pirate, and she will be my guest."

"Here are two officers from the pirate, both of whom were forced to serve the Cuban corsair, and one of them is an experienced surgeon, and hence the very man we need, so I will put him in that berth at once."

"And the other, sir?"

"Is a man I have great respect for, for he took the part of my sister against the corsair and his crew."

"He deserves praise, sir, indeed."

"And I shall give him the acting rank of a lieutenant, next to you, Mr. Manly."

"My dear Captain Lonsdale, let me beg you to let him step into my shoes, and I be next to him, for the truth is I am an humble coast skipper, and feel out of place as first officer of a man-of-war, and this gentleman is doubtless fully acquainted with all duties that will fall to him, while if I yield my rank, no envy can be felt by the other officers, sir."

"Do you really wish this, Mr. Manly?"

"In my heart I do, sir."

"Very well, I will do so."

"You see what you step into, Mr. Harold, an acting rank of senior lieutenant on a king's frigate, and I hope that you are competent to fill the berth?"

"I thank you, Captain Lonsdale, and I feel that I can fill the position, that being my rank on the Spitsfire."

"Again I thank you, sir."

"Then take command, sir, while I go into the cabin with Mr. Manly, to decide what we shall do with the captured schooner."

Whatever decision was arrived at, caused a crew from the frigate to go aboard the Spitsfire. Robert Manly and his son taking charge, and the two vessels to get under way and head along the coast in the direction of the fort which the Ill Omen had left the night before.

As they sailed away in company, the Pretty Ellen, with damages repaired, also set sail and held on her course homeward, the skipper remarking to his wife:

"I declar' to gracious, Ellen, that are the nicest man I ever seen, and his sister are too sweet for nothin'."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PROMOTION.

SHORTLY after the return of the Belle of Blue Water to the town, the skies clouded over and a misty rain began, which soon after turned into a dense fog which drifted its form seaward.

So dense was the fog that the Harbor Patrol boats were compelled to remain stationary, not daring to move for fear of dash ing ashore, into a wharf, or vessels at anchor.

With innumerable lanterns in her rigging, the Saturn was lighted up sufficiently for the work of preparation on board to be kept on through the night, and the ring of hammers and sound of voices were heard continually from the frigate's decks.

At the Military Hall Frank Fenton, in spite of the laborious work of fitting out his vessel with all dispatch for sea, managed to get time to appear and enjoy a bottle of wine with a few convivial friends.

As he hoped to get to sea within a few days, of course the main topic of conversation was regarding his orders to capture the Fatal Frigate.

He was asked innumerable questions by his intimates, as to what he should do, when

The Fatal Frigate.

he sighted the Ill Omen. Whether he would at once open fire upon her, or fire upon her at all if she was flying the English flag?

"I shall, upon sighting her, at once signal her to surrender to me, and if Lonsdale refuses, I shall open fire and capture the vessel," he replied.

"You think Lonsdale will return your fire?" asked one.

"If he does, it will be a sure sign that he has, as many believe, turned pirate, and he must take the consequences."

"You think the Saturn will show great speed, do you not, Fenton?"

"Yes, I am sure of it."

"But the Fatal Frigate is said to be fast."

"I have heard so, but as I never saw her sail in company, I do not know; but Lonsdale thought she was very speedy; but now you must excuse me for awhile, as I am going up to see the admiral, for it is not right to neglect the old gentleman, you know," and the lieutenant left Military Hall, promising to drop in upon his return.

He had received word from his father to visit him, and that was his reason for not neglecting him, as he had expressed it.

The admiral was within, toasting his toes before a cheery wood fire, for the night was chill and he suffered with the gout.

"Well, Frank, you took your time in coming," he said fretfully, as his son entered.

"I had something to do before coming, which I could not neglect."

"So I know, for Colonel Duane saw you attending to it at Military Hall an hour ago, and the flavor of the work you were doing is about you."

"But how about the frigate?"

"The Ill Omen, sir?"

"No; what do you know about the Ill Omen?"

"The Saturn, you mean, sir?"

"Of course."

"The men are working on her in spite of the fog."

"And when will she be ready?"

"In three days."

"Good! But what about her crew?"

"I have had officers at work, sir, and we can get two hundred and fifty in port by stripping the coasters."

"And you have how many?"

"A few over that number."

"Then she will have her full number?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about drilling them?"

"I have them on the French frigate, drilling at her guns."

"Good! and when you get to sea a few days will make them all right in their duties."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I shall set to work to have the French frigate fitted out."

"She will be a great addition to the king's navy, sir, in these waters."

"Truly she will; but it will be hard to get a crew for her."

"Take them from the Ill Omen, sir, when I have captured her."

"Zounds, man! don't be too certain about capturing that craft."

"But I am, sir."

"How do you base your certainty?"

"The Saturn will be as fast as any frigate afloat."

"So hoped."

"She has a hundred more men than Lonsdale has."

"The Le Roi had two hundred more."

"Those were Frenchmen, sir."

"Well, go on."

"The Saturn carries twenty more guns."

"Well?"

"And I shall capture her."

"Granted; you think her convict crew could be turned to use?"

"Why not, sir?"

"The very men that Lonsdale is called a pirate for taking them with him."

"You can pardon them, sir, to serve the king, and he can not."

"Egad! but you are right there."

"No one will wish to serve on the Ill Omen, so you can use her as a guard-ship, and put her crew on the Le Roi."

"That is so; but now tell me about that brig that went to sea this afternoon?"

"That was some of Branscombe's work, for he had some lady friend go out on a

packet, and a pirate was reported in the offing."

"A pirate?"

"Yes, sir; I heard that he was recognized by a brig's skipper whom he chased in as the Cuban corsair, Cutlass."

"Ha! I would give much to have that fellow taken, for he has eluded entire fleets in the Gulf."

"Well, sir, Branscombe borrowed Commodore Vernon's new brig, and got volunteers to go with him; but the pirate ran away from them, and they came back."

"Why did he not call on you to take the brig?"

"He asked me, but I was too busy."

"Then you gave him a crew?"

"No, sir, the men were all at work."

"Silly boy, you made a mistake."

"I am sorry, sir, for the lady was a guest of Miss Vernon; but I'll go there to-morrow night and smooth it over with her."

"Well, to help you, I'll give you your commission as Captain of the Saturn," and the old admiral handed over the precious document, greatly to the joy of his son, who was profuse in his thanks.

"But, Frank, when you go out and sight the Ill Omen, don't be rash, but try and get Lonsdale to come back willingly to port, for I do not wish to injure that fine fellow if it can be helped."

"If he refuses, then threaten, and if he defies you, capture or sink him."

"Good-night, Captain Fenton," and the admiral seemed to enjoy bestowing the title, while the newly-promoted officer hastened to Military Hall to make known his good news.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A MYSTERY OF THE NIGHT.

THE night held to the thick fog, which hung over the harbor and town until the sun was well up above the horizon.

Then its warm rays caused the curtain of mist to rise, and the people were able to glance about them.

Those that looked over the harbor saw the Saturn lying quietly at anchor, while a hundred men were at work in her rigging and upon her decks.

The Le Roi lay half a mile away, and upon her decks were men practicing at the heavy guns.

Several clipper-ships from far-away ports lay off the India wharf, and innumerable other craft, from the stately barque down to the tiny fishing-smack, were anchored about the harbor.

The forts towered up in the distance, with the English flag flying above them, and all became a scene of busy life once more around the wharves and upon the waters.

But all eyes had been arrested by the sight of a strange vessel in port.

At first she had hardly attracted attention, among the numerous other vessels, but then it could not long go unobserved that she was a very remarkable-looking vessel, and that she was armed.

Her hull needed paint badly and was scarred by many a shot-mark.

Her decks were seamed, as with iron missiles flying across and tearing them, and her spars and masts were also splintered in many places.

Her sails were furled, but they were weather-worn until of a dark-brown hue, and her bulwarks were badly shattered.

But for all that she presented a beautiful model, raking masts, and the appearance of being a fleet sailor.

Her guns were in good condition, but strangest of all, not a soul was on board visible to man them.

She rode to her starboard anchor, and above her decks floated the British flag.

What was she, and where were her crew?

Boats began to swarm about her, but none ventured on board, until the cry arose:

"Make way for the guard-boat!"

A boat, with six oarsmen and a young officer seated in the stern, now ran alongside of the strange schooner.

The officer, who was dressed in an artillery uniform, for the guard-boats were manned and officered from the forts, sprung on board and looked about him.

Not a soul met his vision.

Then he walked aft, and his eyes fell upon a letter.

The companionway was closed, and this letter was tacked over the keyhole.

It bore a heavy seal, and what appeared to be a key was inside.

The note was addressed as follows:

"ADMIRAL MARS FENTON,
Commanding His Majesty's Naval and Land Forces,
MASSACHUSETTS COLONY,
AMERICA."

The young officer seemed surprised, and tried the door of the companionway.

It was locked.

He dared not break it open.

So he did the best thing under the circumstances, and that was to place a guard of a sergeant and two men on the schooner, while he, entering his boat, pulled rapidly shoreward.

He was asked many questions by the crowd now gathered on the shore, but, replying to none, he walked briskly on up to the home of the admiral.

That gentleman was just finishing his breakfast, for he was not a late riser, and received his visitor at once, for the servant had said it was on most urgent business.

"Well, Lieutenant Vance, have you caught any smugglers in the fog?" asked the admiral.

"I have caught larger game, my lord admiral, for a strange schooner entered port under cover of the fog last night, and dropped anchor."

"Zounds! a smuggler?"

"She is an armed craft, sir, and not a soul was on board."

"Zounds and zounds!" cried the admiral.

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, what?"

"I boarded her, when the fog lifted and revealed her at anchor, and I found her companionway locked, and this letter, addressed to you, my lord, was tacked over the key-hole."

"Wonderful, sir, wonderful!" and the admiral took the letter as though he suspected it of being an infernal machine prepared expressly for his especial use.

"I—I have not my glasses just handy, Lieutenant Vance, so please step to the window and open the letter and read it," and the admiral seemed to forget that he had his glasses on at the time.

But the young officer was glad of the chance to read the official looking paper, as he had feared that after all he might not be let into the secret of it.

"Read it aloud, sir, and let me know what it says at once," said the admiral, when he saw that the young officer had opened the letter and yet lived.

"It contains a key, sir, doubtless that which unlocks the entrance to the cabin, and—"

"Read it, sir, read it!"

Thus urged, Lieutenant Vance read as follows:

"2 O'CLOCK, NIGHT.
TO ADMIRAL MARS FENTON."

"RESPECTED SIR:—I have the honor to report that I captured the pirate schooner Spitfire, commanded by the well-known Captain Cutlass, the Cuban Corsair."

"Her commander you will find wounded in her cabin, her crew I have at present in irons on board my vessel, and the schooner, with her guns and booty, I send in as a prize of the Ill Omen."

"The schooner is sound, and is well worth repairs, while her guns are of the best."

"Permit me to add that the Spitfire had just captured the coasting packet, Pretty Ellen, after crippling her and killing two seamen by her fire."

"I have the honor to be, my lord,

"Your lordship's obedient servant,
LIONEL LONSDALE,
Commanding
H. M. FRIGATE ILL OMEN."

"Zounds! zounds!" cried the admiral, and not knowing exactly what that meant, the lieutenant simply bowed at each repetition of the word but returned no answer.

After a moment of thought the admiral said:

"I will go with you, sir, for I have a desire to see this pirate and his vessel."

CHAPTER XLV.

A PLUCKY PRISONER.

ACCOMPANIED by Lieutenant Vance, Admiral Fenton drove in his carriage down to the dock where his own barge, with twelve oarsmen, and a coxswain, was always ready for him, though it was seldom he used it.

Lieutenant Vance was pleased to be seen in such close company with so august a person

as was Admiral Mars Fenton, and he could hardly keep his face from showing his delight.

Entering the barge the admiral was about to start out to the schooner, when he beheld Commodore Vernon making his way among the crowd.

Here was a chance to do the commodore a favor, he thought, and so he sent the lieutenant to ask him to join him.

The admiral had it in his mind to ask a loan of the commodore, "until his ship came in," as he put it, and he was anxious to curry favor with him accordingly.

The commodore was glad of the chance to go, and so quickly seated himself in the boat.

The oarsmen gave way with a will, and approached the schooner rapidly, the many boats surrounding it giving the admiral's barge a wide berth.

Upon reaching the schooner's side, the admiral said:

"Now, lieutenant, open the cabin, for you have the key, and have all ready for the commodore and myself by the time we get there."

"We are getting old, you know, so must take our time."

The lieutenant obeyed, but he did not know that the admiral was still a little suspicious, and wanted a foil, if there was any trap set for him.

The lieutenant hastily unlocked the companionway, then opened the door and entered.

It was a richly furnished cabin, in strange contrast with the outer appearance of the vessel, and on a divan reclined the only occupant.

It was the pirate captain.

His right arm was in a sling, his left was free, but irons were upon his ankles and a chain held him to a ring in the floor.

His face was very pale and he looked the picture of misery.

About him was every indication that he had loved to live in luxury, if he died at the rope-end, and his very gorgeous dress rivaled the uniform of the admiral.

"You are Cutlass, the Cuban Corsair, sir, I believe?" said the lieutenant, a tinge of pity at his heart for the man, whose sad eyes were turned upon him.

"Yes, sir, I have won that name by my crimes," was the quiet response.

"Lord Admiral Fenton has just come on board, sir, and will see you."

"I feel honored, and I am sorry I am unable to receive him as I would like to."

"He is here, sir."

"All right, lieutenant?"

"Yes, admiral."

"Go down, commodore."

"After you, admiral."

"No, sir, after you."

So the commodore entered, and the admiral followed.

"Zounds, sir! you are the pirate!" said the admiral, jumping.

"I am; and you are, my lord, Admiral Fenton, I believe?"

"I am glad to welcome you, sir, but I regret exceedingly I am not able to do the honors, as your high rank deserves."

"Zounds, sir! zounds! do you expect an admiral, sir, to be honored by a pirate?"

"Were I differently situated, sir, I would receive you as your rank deserves, pirate though I am," and there was a touch of scorn in the Cuban's words.

"Egad, sir, I am compelled to receive you as your crimes deserve."

"I can expect nothing else, sir."

"Nor need you; but how did you get into this port, may I ask?"

"I came in my schooner, as you see, my lord."

"And how did it get in, sir?"

"Captain Lonsdale brought it here under cover of the flag, sir, and left me to your tender mercies."

"Was he not brought to by the forts or guard-boats?"

"No, sir; he seems to know the harbor well; but I must say you keep a very negligent watch here, and a Frenchman, or a pirate, might run in and sack your town, for all there is to stop one."

"Zounds, sir! zounds! this to my face, sir?"

"Is it not best that you know the truth,

and thus haul your officers up for negligence?

"Why, we passed right under the nose of a large frigate that is fitting out for sea, and saw the lanterns that lighted the men at their work."

"Where were you, sir?" cried the admiral, turning upon Lieutenant Vance, and thus turning the attention from the neglect of his son on the Saturn.

"I came in at midnight, sir, and my duty lies in the upper harbor."

"I won my way to the fort from my port, when I boarded the schooner."

"That clears him; but somebody's head must fall," and the pirate laughed.

"You take your confinement coolly, sir."

"Why fret?"

"You'll be hanged."

"I expect it, my lord," was the calm reply.

"You say that Captain Lonsdale brought this schooner in?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then?"

"Locked me in here and departed."

"Where was his frigate?"

"Outside."

"He returned in his boats?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Where did he capture you?"

"Some six leagues down the coast from here."

"You were wounded in the action?"

"There was no action, for I had captured a packet schooner, and the frigate came upon us unawares, for I was wounded by a mutineer lieutenant."

"Ahl your hand was amputated by the surgeon, I see."

The pirate laughed bitterly and said:

"The mutineer saved the surgeon the trouble—he cut my hand off with his cutlass."

"Well, sir, I will not hang you while you are suffering, but you shall be sent to prison, and when well, you must die."

"You need expect nothing else."

"I do not, my lord."

"Good-day, sir," and turning to Lieutenant Vance, the admiral continued:

"Hold command, sir, until I send an officer to relieve you, and I am glad you were not to blame while on duty, sir."

"I shall not forget you."

"One moment, admiral."

"Yes, commodore."

"This person says he captured a packet schooner."

"Was there a young lady on board?"

"Yes, sir, and a most beautiful being."

"She won my heart at a glance."

"Was she harmed, sir, by your fire on the schooner?"

"No, sir, and the captain of the frigate proved to be her brother."

"Zounds, sir, zounds! egad, what is this?" cried the admiral.

In a few words the commodore explained the situation to the astonished admiral, while Captain Cutlass said:

"I am revengeful, my lord, and if I do not hang, I have a score to settle with Captain Lonsdale; but for all that, I will say he is the pluckiest man in the king's navy, for no other man would dare go to sea in a haunted ship, that Fatal Frigate."

The admiral made no reply, and with the commodore left the schooner, Lieutenant Vance remaining in charge until a crew took possession, and the Cuban outlaw was sent to a cell in the dominion of Captain Stone, to whom he remarked pleasantly as he passed in:

"We have a bond of sympathy between us, so should be friends, for you have one leg, I one hand."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

It was a great pleasure to Commodore Vernon to be able to tell Belle the news when he went home that day to dinner.

She had found out about the outlawry of the Fatal Frigate, and now understood the strange work of Major Branscombe, and why he had been so anxious to get Eve Lonsdale away on the packet schooner before she could learn the bitter tidings.

The commodore told of his visit to the pirate schooner with the admiral, and how they had been received by Captain Cutlass.

He also made known what he had said about Lionel Lonsdale, and added:

"He is right, Lonsdale is a man of marvelous nerve, for just to think of his going to sea, in defiance of all superstition, in that Fatal Frigate, and what is more, taking with him a convict crew."

"He seems to have gotten them well in hand, sir, as he was able to capture the pirate," suggested Belle, who felt pleased at the triumph thus far of the young captain.

"I asked Branscombe, whom I met, to dine with us, Belle, so he will soon be here."

"There he is now, father, riding into the grounds."

"A nice fellow, Branscombe, eh, my child?"

"Yes, father, I like him very much, indeed."

"I thought he was a little sweet on you, but that little Lonsdale girl just captured him, and cut you out."

"It seemed so, father, and I was glad to see that he fancied her so much."

A moment after the major, in all the splendor of his regiments entered.

"Ah, Branscombe, your uniform is at a discount now, since I have seen that gorgeous pirate," said the commodore.

"I was surprised at it myself, sir, for I was his escort to The Tombs; he was as magnificent as an East Indian prince," laughed the major.

"Why, the admiral looked like a middy by comparison; but he is a plucky fellow."

"He is, indeed, sir," and Major Branscombe told what he had said to Captain Stone, adding:

"He suffers agony with his arm, I know, but yet he does not show it."

"I got him to tell me about the man who gave him the blow, and he says it was his lieutenant, a handsome young dare-devil who took sides with Miss Lonsdale against him, for he meant to hold her for a ransom."

"Bravo for the pirate lieutenant," cried Belle.

"So say I, Miss Vernon; but he must be a superb swordsman, as the pirate told me he had never met his match, and had never expected to see a man handle a blade as did his lieutenant."

"And what became of him?" asked Belle with deep interest.

"Lonsdale took him on board the frigate with him, as he did all the pirate crew, surrendering only the chief and his schooner."

"But was not that a clever thing of Lonsdale's, bringing in that schooner as he did, and anchoring her in the harbor?"

Both the commodore and his daughter agreed that it was a daring act, and the former told of having seen the letter sent the admiral by Captain Lonsdale.

"But there is some news, I guess, you have not heard," said the major.

"What is that, pray?" asked the commodore.

"Yes, do not keep us in suspense, Major Branscombe."

"I will satisfy your curiosity at once, by saying that the commander of the new frigate has been appointed."

"Frank Feniton it is then."

"Yes, commodore, and he has his orders, for I heard them last night from one he is intimate with, and, as he makes no secret of them I shall not."

"He is to go out and find the Fatal Frigate, signal Lonsdale to surrender and come into port with him, and, if he gets a refusal he will capture or sink the Ill Omen."

"If he can," muttered the commodore.

"I think, sir, if he signals the situation to Lonsdale he will at once come into port; but if he attempts to threaten him, there will be trouble, I am sure."

"Captain Lonsdale has certainly disabused the idea of outlawry, by capturing the pirate and bringing his vessel into port, though why he did not come in openly with her I cannot understand," Belle said.

"He doubtless feared his crew would be taken from him again, Miss Vernon, and Lonsdale has come out to make a name and he will do it, for I would not be at all surprised to see him come in with a French frigate as the prize of the Ill Omen."

Thus the conversation, as in every other household in the town, turned upon the Fatal Frigate and her daring commander.

After dinner Major Branscombe took a horseback gallop with Belle, who was anxious to visit the scene where so nearly occurred the death of Eve Lonsdale in the stage-coach runaway.

"You did a noble act, Major Branscombe, and I would not blame Miss Lonsdale, if she fell in love with you," said Belle, with a smile.

"I only wish she would," was the quick reply.

Upon the return to Vernon Hall the major was asked to remain to tea, but declined, as he said slyly:

"I heard you were to have a visitor tonight, and I'll give him every chance."

"You see we get as much news at Military Hall as the ladies gather at a sewing circle," and aiding the maiden to alight the major rode rapidly back to the barracks, musing as he went along:

"She loves Lonsdale, that is certain, and he loves her."

"Well, now that I have seen Eve Lonsdale I am resigned."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A WOMAN'S WHIM.

THE commodore was in the habit of having several old cronies visit him each week, and they always made up a game of whist.

Among them was the admiral, the colonel commanding the fort, and a wealthy merchant in the town.

They were all on the shady side of fifty, and made up a genial quartette for a game of whist, while the commodore's wines were certainly never slighted.

It was one of the regular evenings for this party to meet, on the night following the day that the pirate schooner was found in port.

The merchant and the colonel arrived early, and when the admiral came he was not alone.

His son accompanied him, and already he had his rank as captain displayed on a new uniform, which he had ordered in anticipation of his promotion.

He looked very handsome as he was ushered into the parlor where Belle sat, for the old gentlemen claimed the sitting-room on "their evening."

"I am happy to see Miss Vernon looking so well this evening," said the young captain.

"I may return the compliment, and also congratulate you, I believe, upon having obtained your captaincy."

"Thank you—yes; but along with it, which makes it more valuable, the command of the splendid frigate *Saturn*."

"I heard that you were to have the new vessel, and are preparing to sail immediately."

"Yes, within three days I will be at sea."

"And within as many weeks we may expect you back with a French prize," said Belle, with a smile.

"I hope so; but at present, I am ordered upon a painful duty."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, particularly so."

"May I ask its nature?"

"To bring back the *Ill Omen*."

"Ah! I heard something of Captain Lonsdale having been outlawed. I believe," and Belle spoke in the most indifferent manner.

"Yes; at a council of officers, I regret to say, he was considered to have overstepped the bounds, and so was outlawed."

"The vessel he commands does indeed seem doomed to misfortune, for just as soon as she puts to sea, I suppose with every chance of a successful cruise against the French, you are ordered to bring her back."

"It is unfortunate, indeed, and I regret it for Lonsdale's sake, for I esteem him highly, though we have had some differences."

"From what I heard of those differences, as you call them, you have cause to regard Captain Lonsdale highly," wickedly said Belle, and it brought the color into the face of Frank Fenton.

"Will not his having brought the pirate in, Captain Fenton, mitigate or disapprove this brand of outlawry?" asked Belle, glad that she had made Fenton wince by her remark.

"I hope so, though I fear not."

"At least my orders have not been changed by it, so far. But, may I ask if that

lovely young lady I saw you with was Miss Lonsdale, the sister of the captain, as I have heard?"

"Yes; she paid me a short visit, and I was glad to learn was rescued from that fearful pirate."

"It was indeed fortunate; but I did not know Lonsdale had a sister."

"Oh, yes," said Belle, with the air of one who had known all the history of the commander of the Fatal Frigate.

"She is very beautiful."

"And as lovely in character as she is in person."

A silence followed of a few minutes, in which Frank Fenton was making up his mind how to act.

His debts were pressing him hard, and the admiral's were also giving him trouble, and on the way to Vernon Hall his father told him emphatically:

"You must ask the girl to marry you tonight."

"But will she?"

"How the deuce do I know until you have asked her? But if you are engaged to her you stop all these infernal creditors from dogging the life out of us."

"I'll do it, sir," was the firm response, and as he sat there the young sailor had been making up his mind to offer himself to Belle Vernon.

He had winced under her shots now and then; but then she was very beautiful, immensely rich, and he knew she was worth the venture, though it would cut him to the heart to be refused, for his vanity was great.

Before the coming of Lionel Lonsdale he had felt sure of winning the prize, but now he was doubtful.

A length he said, and he threw all the pathos into his voice that he could:

"Miss Vernon, if I seem abrupt in what I am going to say, I hope you will pardon me, for I am ordered away upon a dangerous duty, and—"

"You think it dangerous then, to go after the Fatal Frigate?" said Belle, with a smile.

"A sailor's life is ever in danger, Miss Vernon."

"And they say that the vessel that crosses the path of the Fatal Frigate is doomed."

Frank Fenton started and turned pale.

He had never looked after his hunt for the Fatal Frigate in this light, and his superstitious fears, which were great, were aroused by Belle Vernon's quiet words.

She saw that she had made an impression, but quietly sat in silence awaiting a reply.

"Oh, that is but the talk of old women, who believe in spooks," he said with a forced laugh.

"And yet I have heard it said by brave seamen, and you are well aware that Captain Lonsdale was the only officer of your navy who dared take to sea the Fatal Frigate."

"Yes, he sailed in her, it is true, but he had either to do that, or lay ashore waiting orders; but, Miss Vernon, as I was saying, I wish to speak to you upon a matter very near my heart, for I go to sea in three days, and, should aught happen to me, I desire you to know just how I regard you."

"I have loved you, from our first meeting, and I have tried hard to win your affection in return."

"That I have your friendship and respect, I feel assured, but it is more than that I ask of you, it is your love, and the hope some day of claiming you as my wife, for my heart, my hand and fortune I now offer you."

There was a mischievous light in Belle's eyes, at one time, when he referred to what he asked of her, as though she would like to say:

"My fortune;" but she kept the words from her lips, and after his impassioned speech, which seemed to nearly choke him, when he spoke of his fortune, she said quietly:

"Captain Fenton, I cannot say that your words are a surprise to me, for I have long believed you would some day ask me for my hand; but I cannot now give you an answer, and I must ask you to wait until your return from your present cruise."

He started, while his face lighted up with pleasure as he asked:

"You do not refuse me then?"

"Nor accept."

"Then I shall hope," he eagerly said.

"But remember, I make no promises, I only ask you to wait for a little while for your answer."

"I will do so," was the philosophical reply, when he knew there was nothing else for him to do.

Then through his mind came the thought.

"She means she will take me, if Lonsdale is proven a pirate."

"Well, I'll see that she never marries him," and going home that night with the admiral he told him he thought it was all right, for she had promised to give him her reply upon his return from sea.

"Promised! why, boy, I have promised to pay every creditor a hundred times, and that's all they get."

"She'll refuse you."

"No indeed, sir, especially if Lonsdale is out of the way, and if it is whispered around, father, that we are engaged."

"I'll see to the whispering around then, for it will make our creditors talk less loud."

And Belle Vernon, why had she put off a man for an answer, when she did not love him?

It was a woman's whim, and the whim was that she meant to use Frank Fenton to save Lionel Lonsdale, if the latter should return a prisoner in the Fatal Frigate.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SISTER'S WARNING.

THE decision of Lionel Lonsdale, as regarded the pirate schooner *Spitsfire*, is already known to the reader.

When he sailed with his prize, in the direction of the port, it was his intention to run in and deliver her over to the commandant of the fort.

But, the fog coming on as he was in the offing, it struck him as a good idea to board her and carry her in under cover of the mist, and leave her at anchor near the town, with Captain Cutlass in his cabin, and a letter to the admiral tacked on the companion-way door.

It was no easy matter beneath that curtain of fog, and the darkness, to run the schooner in past the forts, the islands, and up to an anchorage; but Robert Manly and his son knew the waters of the bay with their eyes shut, and the one taking sounding to starboard, the other to port, on the schooner, and passing the word back along a line of men in a whisper, the schooner slowly glided in under just sail enough to steer her in the breath of air that was stirring.

Lowering the anchor noiselessly, the party took to their two boats and the Manlys felt their way out again to the frigate.

A wind was springing up with the coming of dawn, and the Fatal Frigate stood rapidly away upon her course eastward.

When Lionel met his sister at a late breakfast in the morning the *Ill Omen* had left the port many a league astern, and was dashing swiftly along under a cloud of canvas.

Eve looked refreshed, after a good night's rest, but Lionel seemed to read her face well, and saw that she had some deep motive in seeking him.

So, after Brandywine had cleared away the breakfast, he said:

"Come, Eve, tell me what caused you to take that trip by sea?"

"I did not go by sea, brother, I went by the stage from Portland, running to the latter place of course in the little Zephyr.

"I took Craig Comstock's stage to the seaport, expecting to find you there, and, when within a few miles of town would have lost my life but for the daring of a dragoon officer."

"Ah! how was that, my dear little sis?" anxiously asked Lionel.

"Craig had an invalid passenger, and was helping him into the inn, a few miles out of town, when a boy fired a gun, and away the horses started on a run."

"I was the only passenger, and could not get the door open, and gave myself up for lost, knowing the hill down to the mill-stream, when I saw an officer in the king's dragoon uniform dash up and try to stop the horses."

"He was unable to do so, the hill was near at hand, and he knew that the storm of the

night before had washed away the bridge, so he took a pistol from his holster and shot one of the wheel horses."

"Glorious fellow! who was he?" cried Lionel excitedly.

"Major Bert Branscombe."

"My friend! God bless the noble fellow!" and Lionel seemed deeply moved.

"But what then, Eve?"

The landlord and Craig Comstock then came up in a wagon, and the major had him hitch his horse in, in the place of the dead animal, and he got into the stage with me, for Craig had mentioned my name, and took me to the Anchor Inn, for he told me you had sailed the night before.

"Then he went and told Miss Vernon about me, and she and her father came at once in their carriage and took me home with them, where I remained to dinner, and then, as you had gone, and mother was not well, I took passage on the Pretty Ellen for home, the Vernons and the major coming down to see me off."

"I appreciate all they have done for you, Eve; but, after meeting you, they could not help loving you; but now tell me what is the matter with mother?"

"She was not feeling very well, and was anxious about you, for a fisherman saw you on the deck of the Fatal Frigate, in action with the French vessel *Le Roi*, and we feared you were wounded or dead."

"No, I am all right, as you see, Eve."

"But what have you not passed through, brother, for I have heard all."

"One who leads the life I do, Eve, must expect to be daily in deadly danger."

"And such a crew as you have—convicts!"

"Wait until I have a chance to show what they are worth."

"And now pirates, for you said you would make them also members of your crew."

"Yes, and many of them, like those two pirate officers, are innocent of intention to do wrong."

"But they are good sailors and fighters, and pirates and convicts though I have under me, my word for it, they will win their pardon for crimes they have committed."

"Good officers make good men, brother."

"True, Eve; but is there not something else that started you out on the search for me?"

"Well, yes, Leo; but why did you suspect it?"

"From your tell-tale face, sis, which I read as an open book."

"Come, out with it!"

"Well, Leo, Lola Leslie has been to our house."

In spite of his nerve, the young captain started.

"Lola Leslie has been to Sealands?" he asked in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, Leo."

"When?"

"Ten days ago."

"And why?"

"She came to see you."

"Who saw her?"

"I did, and then mother."

"Why did she come?"

"Leo, the girl is mad."

"What do you mean, sis?"

"She loves you to desperation."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry."

"So am I, Leo."

"You would not have me love her?"

"Love her? Why, I should fear her, for she is dangerous."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"What reason have you for thinking so?"

"She came to Sealands in her little yacht, and alone, and she told me who she was."

"Of course I was glad to see her, for I knew you owed your life to her father's skill and her nursing, and I took her up to the house to see mother, for I had met her at the shore, when she landed."

"She then told us that you had visited her home, Bleak Castle, a number of times, and that she loved you, and she had believed that you loved her, though you had never told her so in so many words."

"But she had heard, from some source, that you were paying attention to a young lady at the port where you had been order-

ed, after the loss of your brig, and, before you should marry her she would take your life."

"The girl is mad, as you say, for I have been fond of her, and, but for a circumstance happening of late, might have asked her to be my wife, which, I must frankly confess I have led her to believe I meant to do, and was honest about it, too; but I have changed my mind now."

"She will kill you, Leo, I know it, and she left with the threat to take your life, and that of any woman you loved, and she said she would soon go and find out for herself."

"This is what alarmed mother until she became really nervous and ill, and I told her I would go and see you."

"You are a dear, noble little woman, Eve, and I thank you."

"But I feel that Lola must be checked in this madness of hers, and after I have visited Sealands and taken you home, I will sail for home, the Vernons and the major coming

down to see me off."

"Oh, Leo, she will kill you! I know she will, so beware of that strange, love-mad girl," anxiously said Eve, and for some reason her words impressed Lionel Lonsdale more than he cared to admit.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ON THE TRACK OF THE FATAL FRIGATE.

THE day at last came around when the Saturn was ready to sail.

She lay out in the harbor in all her strength and beauty, and a grand-looking vessel she was, winning the admiration of all who gazed upon her.

The morning that the last stroke of work had been put upon her, Captain Fenton determined to have a few friends to dine with him on board.

He had his crew of five hundred men, and they were a fine-looking set, too.

Not a rope was out of place, every sail set perfectly, the spars were just what could be wished, and the vessel was painted in the very best style.

Her guns were new and worked to a charm, and she certainly looked like a craft to buffet the seas nobly, sail with wondrous speed, and give a good account of herself in an action.

Her cabin had been fitted out most sumptuously, the king's coffers having to pay for many a luxury for the young commander.

And it was by a happy streak of luck that the idea had flashed into his mind to get a loan from his Majesty.

This was done by a demand for certain things that were needed for the Saturn, but which had been taken from on board the *Le Roi*, that is, appropriated.

Of course, these borrowed articles were marked down as having been appropriated by the commander of the Fatal Frigate, and from the paymaster of the king's bills Captain Frank Fenton had received a handsome sum to pay for what had not cost him a pound.

Of course the paymaster did not know this; there was plenty of money just then in his immediate treasury for the king's use, and the admiral had indorsed the requisition of the Saturn's captain for the needed articles.

The result was that Captain Frank Fenton set it down as having borrowed from the king a sum of money, which he meant to turn in from his prize-money as a part of the sales from the *Le Roi*.

The admiral was considerably amazed, the morning of the completion of the Saturn, to have his loved son come up to breakfast with him and casually ask:

"Father, how much do you owe?"

"Zounds, sir! what do you mean?"

"I wish to know if five hundred pounds would clear you of debt here?"

"No, it would just take twice that sum."

Frank Fenton gave a whistle.

"What does that mean?"

"You owe more than I do, sir."

"I am older, sir."

"I had not thought of that, father; but six hundred pounds will clear me."

"And neither of us have one-tenth the sum, and our pay drawn ahead."

"Father, I can let you have just one thousand pounds, with which to pay your debts, and I will pay all I owe, and then no ugly

rumors will get about that I am trying to marry Miss Vernon for her money.

"You know, sir, we are supposed to be rich."

"Yes, and we have lived on that supposition for over a year, for we came here in debt elsewhere; but where on earth did you get the money, my son?"

"I borrowed it, sir."

"I didn't think you could borrow a hundred guineas."

"Yet I borrowed six thousand, sir."

"It's on the credit of my making you captain of the *Saturn*."

"Perhaps so, sir."

"And what fool—ahem—I mean what friend loaned you that sum?"

"Well, sir, I will not mention his name, as it is a secret."

"Some Jew money-lender, I'll wager my sword."

"No, sir, it is a person you regard most highly; but do not ask, for I cannot tell."

"Here is the money, and as a king's dispatch-ship came into port last night, it will be supposed we got the exchange by her."

"Egad! I did get something by her."

"What, sir?"

"Duns, from London."

"I did also, father; but we'll go back rich yet, for I'll get plenty of prize-money."

"That's why I made you a captain, sir."

"Now, father, I do not intend to sail until afternoon, so I have ordered a fine dinner on board ship, and have invited the commodore and his daughter, some other of our friends, and Major Branscombe, for you know it will not do to slight him, for he is enormously rich, has the ear of the king, and is rapidly rising in the army."

"You are right, my son."

"You, sir, will preside, of course, and we will sail with all on board, while the commodore will let his brig, the *Belle of Blue Water*, go out to bring the party back, for she is in trim now, and he has armed her with guns bought from the *Le Roi*, and a good price he paid, too."

"Well, I will go with pleasure, and we can try the speed of the frigate with that of the brig."

Thus it was arranged, and by one o'clock a pleasant party were assembled on board the *Saturn*, and her young commander, with his father's and his own debts paid, and about to start forth on a special cruise on so fine a vessel, felt most happy indeed.

The *Belle of Blue Water*, under a crew of fishermen, for no other crew could be obtained, and with Skipper Manly—Old Harpoon—in command, was standing off and on in the harbor, waiting to run out with the frigate and fetch the party back again, while the *Saturn* continued on her cruise.

The dinner was a sumptuous one, the wine excellent, and the guests were made most happy.

Belle Vernon treated the young captain with marked kindness, which made the old admiral say to himself:

"He's won the girl, that's certain."

"She loves him, and he cannot help it."

At length the dinner was over and the order was given to weigh anchor and set sail.

The men sprung nimbly to their work, and the frigate began to move just as Skipper Manly brought the brig down astern to try her speed.

Then the crew went to quarters, and a salute of a hundred guns to the king, the town, the forts and the admiral was fired, the forts replying.

The breeze was fresh, and the party on deck, as well as hundreds on shore were deeply interested in the race between the brig and the *Saturn*.

And Captain Fenton was greatly delighted to see that the frigate held her own with the brig, which was undeniably fast, and in a ten-knot breeze should have walked away from her.

"I can catch the Fatal Frigate in this craft," said Frank Fenton eagerly, to Belle Vernon, who was next to him.

"Do not forget that it is an ill omen to cross the path of the Fatal Frigate, Captain Fenton."

Her words dampened his ardor at once, and brought back that same feeling of dread to his heart.

"For my sake," she added in a low tone: "do not risk a weird peril by searching

for that fatal craft, for how much misery and death she has been the cause of."

Before he could reply the admiral called out that they were ready to put back, and the brig was signaled to come near.

The fact was that the commodore had suggested the idea that they might see the Ill Omen, and, as it was growing dark, and she might be lurking inshore, the admiral deemed it best not to let the ladies risk any unnecessary peril.

So farewells were said, an admiral's salute was given, with rousing cheers, and the Belle of Blue Water put back for port, while the Saturn went on her way, the last words of Belle Vernon echoing weirdly in the ears of the young commodore of the really splendid ship:

"Heed my warning, Captain Fenton, and beware of the Fatal Frigate."

CHAPTER L.

THE SATURN RETURNS TO PORT.

THE townspeople who were wont to sit up late, from various causes, reported the next morning—the day following the one on which the Saturn sailed—that they had heard heavy firing during the night, and it sounded very much like a combat at sea between large vessels.

The admiral had heard the same, and, in spite of his debts having been paid, he was unable to sleep.

The commodore had also been awakened by the firing, and he had gone to arouse Belle, when he found that he was standing by the open window, enveloped in a cloak, and already listening to the roar of the guns.

"You hear them, my child?"

"Yes, father."

"They are a long way off."

"How far, sir?"

"Fully fifteen leagues."

"It is at sea?"

"Yes."

"And must be the Saturn?"

"Doubtless."

"And the Ill Omen?"

"It may be."

"What else could it be, sir?"

"The Saturn may have met a Frenchman."

"Then it is a large vessel, for that firing is very heavy."

"Very."

"Which way did the Saturn head?"

"South by west."

"And that firing?"

"Is just about where she would be."

"Hark! hear that terrible broadside, sir."

"Yes, and it seems to be growing louder."

"Then it is coming nearer."

"So it would seem."

They listened for some little time, and then the commodore said:

"It is growing louder rapidly."

"Then they are coming nearer, father."

"Yes, and it has resolved itself into a chase."

"How can you tell?"

"Do you not observe, my child, that we hear no more terrific broadsides?"

"Yes, sir."

"But a steady firing from half a dozen guns, replied to by as many more?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the sound grows louder?"

"Yes, father."

"Then that means a chase."

"One vessel is flying then?"

"Without doubt."

"Ah! which is it?"

"It is hard to tell."

"The Saturn is so much heavier in tonnage and guns, and has many more men than the Ill Omen."

"So had the Le Roi."

"But surely, father, Frank Fenton would not fly from the Ill Omen?"

"It would hardly be possible, after all the flourish of trumpets with which he went to sea."

"But one vessel is surely flying?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"We will know in the morning, sir."

"Yes, it is now two o'clock, so go back to bed and get what sleep you can, for by eight o'clock we will know what it all means."

The same feeling of anxiety was felt at Military Hall.

One o'clock was the usual hour for the

late stagers to retire to their quarters, and before that time the firing was heard.

Major Branscombe had just started for his barracks, when, with others he turned back.

Upon the top of Military Hall was a lofty cupola, and up to this a score of officers made their way.

From there the firing could be very distinctly heard, and afar off, as they looked over the sea, they could see flashes, like heat-lightning.

All felt that it could but be the Saturn.

But what had she run against?

That was a question none could answer.

That it was the Fatal Frigate 'most all feared and believed.

After awhile it became evident to the watchers that the fight was becoming a chase.

One of the combatants had met its master, and was making for port, that was certain.

"Lonsdale would die before he would run," said Major Branscombe.

"It cannot be Fenton, for he has as fine a craft as floats," said another.

"I stake a thousand guineas that the craft that is running is not the Fatal Frigate," cried Major Branscombe.

"I wager the same sum, sir, that if it is either the Saturn or Fatal Frigate that is running, that it is not Fenton's ship," cried a young and enthusiastic admirer of Frank Fenton, with more money than brains.

"I wager, Mr. Conrad, that if either of two vessels named are in the fight, the Saturn is flying, and you wager that it is not the Saturn?"

"Yes, Major Branscombe."

"Consider the wager closed, sir, without posting our money, and daylight will reveal," said the major calmly.

For a long time they waited in the cupola, then went down and had a few bottles of wine, to keep the chill night air from giving them colds, after which all the party started for the shore.

Day was breaking, and the firing had now come so near, that suddenly the heavy guns of the fort were heard to open rapidly.

Reaching a point of observation, the group of officers gazed out over the harbor.

There in the offing, having defiantly dropped anchor, just out of range of the guns of the fort, were two vessels.

One was a large frigate, floating the tricolor of France, and the other was a sloop-of-war under the same flag.

But coming up the harbor to an anchorage was another vessel.

That one was the Saturn.

But who could have recognized the beautiful vessel of the day before, for her fore and mizzen topmasts were shot away, her bulwarks were shattered, her sails torn with shot, her rigging dangling here and there, a main-yard cut in two, several guns dismounted, and her decks strewn with dead and dying men.

The Saturn had returned, and her enemies had chased her into port!

Running up to her old anchorage, she dropped her anchor, but not a gun was fired in honor of any victory won, and Major Branscombe said, quietly:

"I have won, Mr. Conrad, for the Saturn was the flying craft; but I will not claim the money, as she was not running from the Fatal Frigate, although she looks very much as though she had met her."

CHAPTER LI.

A FOE'S DEFIANCE.

HARDLY had the Saturn dropped anchor when a boat was lowered, and shot away from its side.

Instead of heading for the regular landing, where a large crowd had assembled, it went to an unfrequented wharf, and Frank Fenton sprung ashore.

Just as he was hastening up the secluded street, coming down from the hill of observation, he met the crowd of young officers.

Nothing could have been more unpleasant for him, for he had sought to avoid everyone, and reach the admiral's quarters unquestioned.

Instantly a murmur of sympathy was heard, and a score of questions were on as many lips; but with a bow he simply passed on, saying as he did so:

"You will know my report in good time, gentlemen."

The admiral was up, and at an early breakfast.

He was nervous and ill at ease, for it had been reported to him that a vessel was coming into the harbor that looked like the Saturn.

"Well?" he said, sternly, as he saw his son enter the room.

"I am back, sir."

"Your cruise was a short one."

"Necessarily so."

"I suppose you brought the Fatal Frigate in with you?"

"I have not seen her."

"Ah!" and the admiral brightened up.

"No, sir; I met the French."

"And ran from a Frenchman—for, boy, I have ears that do not deceive me, as I have been in too many chases at sea not to know one by the firing."

"You have been in the leading ship, if I remember rightly, sir, on several occasions."

"Zounds, sir! zounds!" and the admiral flushed with anger.

"I was but following my honored father's example."

"Egad, sir, I never ran from an enemy of my size, sir!"

"Nor did I."

"What! a French frigate on this coast larger than the Saturn?"

"No, sir; the French frigate Minerva of sixty guns, just the size of the Saturn, and a sloop-of-war of twenty guns, which looked very much like the British sloop Rajah, which sailed from here a month ago on a cruise south."

"Hah! the two of them fought you, then?"

"Yes, sir. I sighted the Minerva and stood down to attack her, not seeing the sloop-of-war that was hiding behind her, and they both opened heavily."

"The fire of the Minerva was very disastrous, and as I saw they intended to board together, I put away for a running fight."

"The speed of the Saturn alone saved me, and the fire of both vessels was fearful."

"I returned it hotly, and they chased me right under the guns of the fort and are now anchored outside."

"The scoundrels! But what damage have they done you?"

"I was cut up pretty badly, for it will take some days to repair damages, work as I may."

"And your losses?"

"I lost a score killed and twice as many wounded."

"What damage did you do the enemy?"

"I could not tell, sir; but I think I gave them as good as I got."

"Well, my son, you must get the Saturn in fighting trim at once, and I'll man that craft of Vernon's, his brig and also the pirate schooner, which fortunately has not been dismantled yet, and these vessels will put you on even terms with the Frenchmen, and you must go out and capture them."

"If you decline the work, egad, sir, I'll go myself!"

"I do not decline, sir, for I shall go; and if you will send orders to get the brig and schooner in trim, and man them, I will have the Saturn ready in three days."

"Bravo, my son! that is the true ring."

"Just like your father, sir—just like me."

And in his delight at recognizing in his son a "chip of the old block," the admiral warmly shook his hand.

Frank Fenton at once returned to the Saturn, the dead and wounded were removed, and all hands were set to work to repair damages.

The admiral sent a note to Commodore Vernon, asking for the brig in the name of the king, and received reply that he would command her himself and ship a crew as soon as possible.

In the absence of naval officers in port of high rank, Major Branscombe volunteered to command the pirate schooner, and that craft was immediately hauled in for repairs necessary to take her into action.

With the brig's ten guns and the schooner's seven, the Saturn and the Minerva being of a size, it was considered that the forces would be equal, for the sloop was now recognized beyond a doubt as the British vessel-of-war Rajah, of twenty guns.

This was so much the greater reason why the Frenchmen should be taken, for the

crew of the Rajah were doubtless prisoners on board the frigate, which had evidently drawn upon her crew to man her prize.

But the Frenchmen calmly lay off the harbor, two leagues out at sea, as though to blockade the port.

Thus the day passed away when toward night a sail was seen in the distance, heading for the harbor, and its coming seemed to cause some excitement on board the French vessels in the offing.

CHAPTER LII.

A PIRATE'S JEWELS.

The man who had so bravely met his captivity, and uttered no complaint under the severe wound he had received, which deprived him of a hand, was turned over to the tender mercies of Captain Stone, to remain a prisoner in that living tomb, until called to one beneath the earth by way of the gallows.

His pluck had won the admiration of all who had been brought near him, in the way of duty, and, in spite of his being the Cuban Corsair, stained by many crimes, he was treated kindly, for he was looked upon as a dying man would be.

He had been placed in a cell, guarded over by a stern-faced man, whom he quietly entered into conversation with.

After a short stay in the cell, he muttered to himself.

"He will not do."

For some reason known only to himself, he asked to be removed to another cell, and he was granted his wish by being placed under another guardian.

A short stay here, and a quiet talk with his guard, seemed also to dissatisfy the pirate, and with many apologies for the trouble he gave, he asked to be again removed.

This was done, with the hint that the prison was not an inn, where a choice of rooms would be allowed.

"He will do," muttered the pirate, after a talk with his guard.

That night, as the guard passed along the corridor, the outlaw asked him to approach his door.

He was locked in a cell, with a grated gate of iron, and one window.

On account of the raid made on that particular corridor by Lionel Lonsdale, there were very few persons in that ward, and these were not near the pirate's cell.

"My friend, I suppose I will be hanged soon," said the pirate, addressing his guard.

"I suppose so, sir."

"It is a sad thing to die young."

The guard thought it was a sad thing to die at all.

"Not with honor, my friend; but my life has been a mistake, and, if I had it to live over I would be a great man."

"There is to be a war between the Colonies and Great Britain, and I would like to command a vessel in the American Navy."

"I tell you, sir, you are right, for I'm an American," said the guard with great enthusiasm.

"Now, I knew that at a glance; but I will have to die."

"Yes, sir."

"Life is precious."

"It is, sir."

"How much would you give for your life, if you were doomed to die?"

"All I had, sir."

"Say you had ten thousand pounds, would you give it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say you had but two thousand, would you give it?"

"Of course, sir."

"I suppose you have a nice little home, paid for, and a family?"

"No sir, I'm not married, but I hope to be when I get money enough, for I am from the Carolinas, and there is a girl waiting for me, and has been for three years."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are saving up your money, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much would you want to marry on?"

"If I had five hundred pounds, I'd marry, but I haven't got half that saved up."

"Five hundred pounds would buy you a house?"

"Oh, yes, sir, but it's many a long day before I see it."

"My man, would you like to see a man hung?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not."

"It makes me shudder to think of your dying that way."

"You are good-hearted."

"Now, if you had your say, as one of my judges, mind you, would you not let me go free, if you felt I meant to lead a different life, and serve in the navy of America against the English?"

"Indeed I would, sir."

"Do you see this stone?"

And the pirate took from the bandages on his wounded arm a handsome diamond.

"Take it to the lamp yonder and look at it."

The man did so.

Do you know anything about precious stones?"

"Yes, sir, for my father was a silversmith, and I worked in his shop."

"What is that stone?"

"A diamond, sir."

"What is its value?"

"I should say, sir, a hundred pounds."

"You are a good judge, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"Now what is this worth?"

It was a ruby, and the man took it also to the lamp and looked at it.

"Well?"

"It is about the same as the diamond, sir."

"You are a judge."

"Now take this."

It was an emerald.

The guard walked again to the lamp and returning said:

"It is of the same value, sir."

"Yes, and this, and this?"

In turn he handed out a sapphire and pearl.

The guard gave the value correctly.

"Now, my man, I do not wish to be hanged like a dog, and, as you see, I have here jewels of rare value, and a few more."

"I will tell you what I will do."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to get some money on this diamond, so you take it, go to-morrow, when off duty, to a money-lender, and get me the bills."

"Yes, sir."

"Then, when you return to-morrow night to duty, I will place in your hands jewels valued at just one thousand pounds, and for them you are to let me out of this living tomb."

"It is not thought that I can get around easily, with my wound, but I can, and we will go together, and I will accompany you to the Carolinas and see you happily married."

"Oh, sir!" and the guard trembled violently with dread and hope.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE BRIBE-TAKER'S REWARD.

The guard took the diamond and walked quickly away from the cell.

What the result would be the pirate was not sure, but he believed that he knew his man.

He had been cunning enough to have his lieutenant, English, in doing up his wound, to hide among the bandages a large number of precious stones.

The search that had been made, when he entered the prison, had not revealed them, and so he felt that he held his liberty in his own hand.

The guard never came near his cell again that night, and at dawn went off duty, and another man came on.

The day dragged slowly along to the pirate prisoner, but when eight o'clock came the guard came with it, and in passing the cell he handed into it a small package.

It was a hundred pounds in bank notes.

"He is safe," muttered the pirate.

About ten o'clock the guard came to the cell and said:

"Captain Stone sleeps in the room through which we have to pass, and I would not have harm befall him for the world."

"Could he be bribed?"

"He would kill the man that offered it," was the quick reply.

"Well, does the captain take a supper?"

"Every night, sir."

"At what time?"

"About eleven, sir, before he goes to bed, he has a cup of coffee, which he makes himself, and a little cold lunch."

"Good! I have here a powder which produces sleep."

"It is given me to lull my pain, and if you can drop this into his cup of coffee, it will cause him to drop off to sleep."

"It is not poison, sir?"

"No indeed, unless too much is used."

"I am afraid, sir."

"My man, why take the keeper's life, when a drug will cause him to sleep soundly for a few hours, and in that time we can be far away."

"True, sir, and I drew my money from the merchant that had it, and bought a boat."

"Did the man who sold you the boat know you?"

"No, sir, he lived down the coast, and sails to night."

"He will take us out with him, for he has a nice fishing smack, and we will land him on the coast somewhere, while we go on."

"You have planned well, my man."

"But the keeper, sir?"

"Here is the powder, so go into the room of the keeper for some excuse, and drop this in his coffee."

Five minutes after the keeper saw the guard enter.

"What is it, Bonus?" he asked.

"That wild pirate, sir, wants a cup of coffee, as he says he is suffering."

"Give it to him, for there sets the pot on the coals, and I was going to have my supper soon."

"I don't begrudge a dying man anything."

The guard took a tin cup and went to the hearth.

Taking up the pot, he poured out a cup, and then slipped the powder into what was left.

"Thank you, captain," he said, as he went out the door.

"I've brought you a cup of coffee, sir, for it may revive you and you need it," he said to the pirate.

"You put the drug in the keeper's cup?"

"In the pot, sir."

"There is no mistake?"

"No, sir."

"Then here goes."

He drank the contents of the cup with seeming relish, and then said:

"To show you that I act squarely with you, my man, here are your jewels."

"Take them to the lamp and you will see that they represent one thousand pounds."

"In a short while take the tin cup back and see if the captain is not asleep."

"Yes, sir," and the guard began to walk up and down his beat.

His thoughts were excited, and he started at every sound.

He had lived an honest life, struggling to lay up enough money to marry the girl he loved.

He had left his home in the Carolinas, and sought everywhere to make his little fortune.

It had been slow, up-hill work.

Now here was a chance to make what seemed a fortune to him in a very easy way.

He felt he was doing wrong; but he cleared his conscience by the thought that he was saving the life of a man he pitied.

At length he went toward the keeper's door.

He opened it softly and entered.

There sat the keeper in his chair, his head bowed forward upon the table.

He stepped toward him, calling him by name.

There was no response. His cup of coffee had been emptied, his half-eaten supper was on the table.

He touched the keeper, and he fell from his chair to the floor.

He attempted to raise him, but found that he appeared utterly lifeless.

He turned him over and the eyes were open in a wild stare.

"He is dead!" moaned the man, and seizing the keys he darted back to the pirate.

"It is but the semblance of death."

"He will recover," said the pirate calmly.

"Oh no, sir."

"Did you bring the keys?"

The Fatal Frigate.

"Yes, sir."

"Then open my door."

The man tremblingly obeyed.

He was completely under the spell of the pirate.

The outlaw quietly led the way to the door, and the guard opened it.

"See, sir, he is dead," said the guard, pointing to the form on the floor.

"True, he is dead, for it is best to have no mistakes."

"Put him in his bed, and turn down the lamps, so if any other guard should come there will be no discovery."

The pirate was perfectly calm, the guard was terribly excited, but he obeyed the order of the outlaw.

This done, they unlocked the door and passed out.

"Lock the door behind you and give the key to me."

"I wish it for a souvenir," said the pirate, with a bitter laugh.

The guard obeyed in silence, and then led the way down to the shore of the harbor.

A man was there with a boat, and, getting into it, they were rowed out to a small smack, which at once put to sea.

The man who had sold the smack was landed four days after, at a secluded part of the coast, and the little craft held on its way southward, running by night from anchorage to anchorage, and laying up by day.

When at last the little vessel put into a southern port by night, but one man was on board.

That man was the pirate chief, and he muttered grimly:

"I could not spare those precious stones, and his life was of no value to me now."

So had the false guard met his punishment, and he had freed a man who was yet to redden many a deck with the blood of the innocent, and make himself loathed and dreaded along the American coast as the Ocean Ogre.

But with his career in this romance we have done.

CHAPTER LIV.

SEALANDS.

UPON the shores of Casco Bay still stands an old homestead, which has borne the shock of many a storm.

Over a century ago it was erected by an English officer of the royal navy, who, crippled in battle, married an American girl and settled down to the enjoyment of a quiet life in view of the sea he loved so well.

A man of wealth, he had purchased large tracts of land and built a substantial home, filling it with every comfort to be had in those colonial days.

Here at Sealands, as he named his place, his two children, Lionel and Eve, were born.

Becoming Americanized through his wife, his children were brought up to love their country and their home.

Lionel, as a lad, was wont to spend days in sailing over the waters of the bay, and became noted as a bold sailor and a skillful pilot.

One day his little fishing smack, in which he and a negro companion were alone, was caught in a violent storm, dismantled, and driven far out to sea.

For several days they drifted about, almost dying of hunger and cold, and then were picked up by a British sloop of war bound to India.

Lionel and the negro at once acted as cabin-boys, and took the long cruise to that far-away land, for there was nothing else to do.

Once, while becalmed, the commodore, for it was a flagship, had taken a plunge into the sea for a bath, and seized with a cramp, he would have drowned had not Lionel sprung overboard and held him up until a boat was lowered and rescued him.

He was, for his gallant act, given a middy's berth in the king's navy when he left India on another vessel bound to England.

Thus it was, when his parents, who had given him up for lost more than a year, saw him walk up to Sealands one day, accompanied by the faithful Brandywine, and clad in the uniform of a midshipman of the royal navy.

Glad indeed were their hearts at his return, and they watched his career with pride

as he rapidly went up the scale of promotion until he became a lieutenant.

At this time his father died, and Lionel inherited his wealth.

But, wedded to the sea, he still remained an officer of the king's navy against the entreaties of his mother and his young sister for him to resign and live at Sealands.

"It is doing me good, mother, for future work, as some day I will be called upon to serve my own country," he was wont to say.

Continuing his rapid promotion, he became a captain for "gallant services rendered the king," and was, as the reader has seen, placed in command of the Fatal Frigate, when he became a Rival in Love and War of Frank Fenton, the admiral's son.

Never having traded upon his father's fame as an honored officer, or caring to make known that he was rich, Lionel Lonsdale had won the reputation of having risen from a poor cabin-boy, a report he never deemed it necessary to contradict.

Having made the reader acquainted with the fact that my hero was a nobody, as Lieutenant Frank Fenton was wont to often slurringly remark, I will now present him to Sealands one pleasant afternoon, some days after Eve Lonsdale became her brother's guest upon the Fatal Frigate.

Upon the broad piazza, that ran across the front of the mansion, sat an elderly lady with a refined face, and one that showed traces of former beauty.

She was watching a large frigate that had come to anchor some distance off, and from which a boat was coming ashore.

In that boat, besides the oarsmen and coxswain, were Lionel Lonsdale, his sister and Brandywine.

Landing at the little pier, they hastened up to the house, and happy indeed was the mother to greet her noble son and beautiful daughter.

In a few words she heard all, and Brandywine also was cordially greeted, for he was the one who had been the little negro boy blown out to sea in the storm with Lionel, and through all had followed his master's wanderings.

"But oh, my son, it is said that you command the Fatal Frigate, that doomed craft," cried the mother, as they sat together that night.

"Mother, that is one of the finest vessels afloat, though her career has been an ill-fated one."

"But they say she is haunted."

"She is, in a measure, and only yesterday I learned the secret of the ghost on board, whom the men call the Woman in White."

"It seems that there was a cabin-boy on board, when she was a prison-ship, and the scourge carried prisoners and keepers away."

"This boy did not die, but his mind became affected, and he clung to the ship, hiding in out-of-the-way places, and then cunningly making for himself a secret closet in the officers' store-room, next the cabin."

"He robed himself in white, and Brandywine knew his secret, but had sworn not to divulge it, and he did not do so, even to me, until the poor boy was taken ill on the run here."

"He is now getting better, and is in hiding in my cabin, and, as it does no harm, and really helps me in certain ways, I will let him still remain as the 'Ghost of the Fatal Frigate.'

"This is the mystery, mother, and it must remain a secret between us."

"Now, my son, that fearful girl has been here again, since Eve left."

"You mean Lola Leslie?"

"Yes, and she is even more mad than your Ghost of the Fatal Frigate."

"I will go and see her to-morrow."

"Oh, Lionel! she swears that she will kill you."

"Still, mother, I must go and see her, for she shall know that I will never make her my wife."

"Thank Heaven I hear you say that, my son."

"I feared that you loved her."

"No, mother, the girl infatuated me, and, but for meeting one other, I suppose I would have called it love, and asked her to become my wife."

"Now I know my heart better, and though I feel deep pity for poor Lola, she must

know at once that our paths through life go different ways."

"When do you go, my son?"

"To-morrow, mother."

The next day the Fatal Frigate sailed for the little bay near Bleak Castle, the home of Lola Leslie.

CHAPTER LV.

A WOMAN'S VOW.

IT was night when the Fatal Frigate dropped anchor in the cove under the shadow of the cliffs upon which stood Bleak Castle.

The sun had not long set, and the moon was rising out of the sea, as Lionel Lonsdale climbed the steep pathway leading to the cliff above.

He had reached the top, and was about to continue on up to the dreary-looking mansion, when suddenly a form stepped out from a group of pines and confronted him.

The moonlight fell full upon the one who had appeared before Lionel Lonsdale, as an apparition might, and it revealed the face and form of Lola Leslie.

As white as the robe she wore, with her black hair hanging in masses about her shoulders and her eyes burning brightly, she looked like a being of another world.

Very beautiful she was, yet it was a strange, weird, wild beauty, such as a man might dread to become infatuated with.

"So you have come?"

Her voice was hoarse with suppressed emotion, its sweetness, natural to it, having gone.

"Yes, Lola, I am here; but are you ill?"

"No!"

"What on earth ails you, child?"

Lionel Lonsdale held forth his hand as he spoke.

She drew back, and said:

"I will touch your hand only in one way."

"Well?"

"How do you offer it?"

"In purest friendship."

"How do you define friendship?"

"Such a feeling as I feel for my sister, the purest love man can feel for woman."

"I am not your sister."

"No, but I regard you as such."

"Men do not wed their sisters?"

"No."

"I do not wish to be your sister."

"Then be my friend."

"Friendship is icy; it is love that burns."

"I love you very dearly, as I have said, Lola."

"Bah! it is friendship you feel for me."

"Call it so, Lola."

"Did you never feel love for me?"

"Lola, let me be frank with you."

"Well?"

"Once I served you a good turn, and your radiant beauty impressed me, though you were only a child, and I saw you but a moment in the glare of the hallway where you went to school."

"I awoke to consciousness after a fearful wound, and saw you over me."

"I learned how you had saved my vessel, my crew and myself."

"I found that you had had me taken to your home, yonder across the lawn, and that your father's skill and your gentle, devoted nursing, had brought me back from out the shadow of the grave to life."

"I loved you, Lola, for your devotion to me, and I felt that what I felt was all that man could feel for the woman he wished to make his wife."

"I visited you, and I became more deeply interested in you than ever."

"But a short while ago I began to analyze my feelings, and I was sure that I loved you only as a sister."

"I became convinced that it would be sacrilegio to ask you to be my wife, and now I have come to tell you that I will ever be as a brother to you."

"I regret to have to speak this way, to tell you this, but I have been forced to it from the fact that twice you have been to my home."

"You have made known to my mother and sister that you loved me, and vowed that either you would be my wife, or one of us should die."

She listened to his every word, and not once did she take her eyes off of his face.

At length she said, and her voice was deep and quivering:

"I have offered my love unasked, Lionel Lonsdale, but it is all the same all that a woman can offer."

"It is my nature to love, and you are my idol."

"Perhaps it might have gone on for years, without my knowing what you were to me, had not an old schoolmate in the city, whom I met when last in Portland, told me that she had heard you were to marry a lady living in the port where you had been ordered on duty."

"Lionel Lonsdale, that told me what I felt for you, and I vowed not to lose you."

"I felt that you were mine, for I brought you out of the grave, as it were, and, in my frenzy, I went to your home."

"I was mad, yes, love-mad, and I am so still."

"I have heard your definition of friendship, of love, and I know now what you feel for me."

"You love another, as I love you, and all I have to do is to tell you what I shall do."

"And what is that, Lola?"

"It is to take your life, or mine."

"Ah, Lola, do not speak thus, for there is much happiness in store for you, and surely, with my life on your hands, you would not be happy."

"Yes, I would rather have your life on my conscience than the knowledge that you loved another."

"Lola, be sensible; let me be your friend, and all will be well."

"There is no sense for a love-mad woman."

"It is your life or mine."

He saw that she was in deadly earnest, but to try and change her, he said:

"I wish you to live, Lola, so take my life if you will be the happier thereby."

She drew a knife quickly from beneath the folds of her dress, and said:

"I saw your vessel coming, and I prepared for you, for I feared that you would cast me off."

"No, no, I do not cast you off, for I am your brother, Lola!"

"You have got to die, Lionel Lonsdale, and by my hand."

She raised her knife, but he did not shrink.

His eyes watched her every movement, and his hand was ready should she strike.

Suddenly she burst forth with:

"No! no! no! I cannot kill you."

"But I will die!"

She bounded away from him like a deer, and ere he could check her, had bounded from the cliff.

Down she went, flashing through the moonlight, to disappear beneath the waves seventy-five feet below.

With rapid bounds Lionel Lonsdale ran to his boat, sprung in and rowed around to the spot where the white form had disappeared beneath the waves.

But the search was unavailing, and with a heart filled with woe, he wended his way to the old stone mansion to make known to her father the sad end of his daughter.

But the master was away, the servants said, and might not return for days.

For two days did the frigate hold her anchorage, while the young captain searched for the body.

But the sea did not give up its dead to him, and he was forced to set sail, bearing the fatal memory in his heart, wherever he might go, that Lola Leslie, the woman to whom he owed his life, who had brought him back from the brink of death, had kept her love-mad vow and, sparing him, had taken her own life.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE VICTORY.

It will be recalled by the reader, at the time night was coming on and shutting out from the view of those on shore the two French vessels lying at anchor in the offing, that a sail was discerned coming toward the port.

This sail, it seemed, had caused some excitement on board the two Frenchmen, for they were seen to be getting up anchor, and, as the twilight deepened to darkness, they were visible from the shore, slowly moving out toward the sea.

Had they sighted a foe? Had they sighted a friend?

Did they intend to give up the short blockade they had placed upon the port?

In-shore all was wonder regarding the movements of the two vessels and that strange sail.

The work of repairs upon the Saturn went rapidly on.

Then there was the repairing of the pirate schooner, and the rigging for action and putting of her guns on board of the brig, Belle of Blue Water.

These preparations, with the knowledge that all must be ready to go out to fight the Frenchman within three days, created considerable excitement in the town.

The army and the navy were alike excited, and many a gallant officer had volunteered to go out under Major Branscombe on the pirate schooner, while equally as many wished to serve under Commodore Vernon on the brig.

In the midst of the excitement, some two hours after midnight, a flash was visible far out to seaward, followed by the deep boom of a heavy gun.

Almost instantly the town was awake, for word had come up from the fort that the strange sail had run in toward the Frenchmen and then stood off.

Then there had been a chase by the Frenchmen, and the next seen from the fort of the stranger was that she had been aided by a complete shift of the wind, and in a fair race for port had distanced her pursuers.

But instead of running in, as she could have done, said the officer from the fort, who had made his report to the admiral, she had seemed to wait for the coming of the Frenchmen.

The officer, as a matter of course, had gone to Military Hall after delivering his report to the admiral, and, telling his story there, he had added:

"My idea is that the third vessel is the Fatal Frigate, and the best place for you gentlemen to see a combat is Lookout Point; but I shall go back to the fort."

Hardly had he uttered the words when the sound of the heavy gun was heard out at sea.

Instantly the large party of *bon vivants* at the Military Hall started for Lookout Point.

Ere they reached there, there was a continuous roar of artillery, and they knew that a combat was going on.

Arriving there, the moonlight revealed three vessels at sea, and the red glare of the guns told them they were foes.

The three were standing off and on, two rather close together, the other alone, and they were firing with terrific earnestness.

Major Branscombe had a powerful night-glass, and he turned it upon the combatants.

"Those two vessels to the left are the French frigate and her captured British prize, the Rajah," he said.

"And the one vessel fighting them?" asked Captain Frank Fenton, and there was a tone of exultation in his voice.

"Is the Fatal Frigate, sir?"

The cheer that broke from the crowd at these words was proof of the pluck of Lionel Lonsdale.

"He'll soon have to run in," said one.

"He was careful to get near home before he fought," said another.

"He will be whipped badly," remarked a third.

The speakers were all the admirers of the admiral's son."

"It is not possible that he can last long against them," Frank Fenton himself remarked.

"Well, captain, take my glass and you will see that he does not look like running away," said Major Branscombe, quietly.

The young captain of the Saturn took the glass, and after a short look through it, he handed it back.

"Well, captain?"

"He is holding his own so far, I am glad to see," said Frank Fenton, but his looks belied his words.

"I think that looks as though he was not afraid to let his enemies come between him and port, for he is sailing seaward," said one.

"Yes, they can now cut him off if they wish," remarked another.

"See! the Fatal Frigate stands directly for the sloop-of-war."

"Does he intend to board?"

This question was answered by seeing the Fatal Frigate luff quickly and send a broadside upon the sloop-of-war.

The effect was terrible, for the sloop-of-war seemed but a wreck, and, as the ill Omen did not deliver another broadside, but headed for the large frigate, it was very evident that the Rajah had struck her colors.

A wild yell went up at this moment from the officers and other lookers-on, and, as Admiral Fenton arrived just at that instant, he took it for a cheer in his honor, for he recognized at a glance a number of his former creditors who had been paid up a few days before.

In response he raised his chapeau.

But, as no one noticed him, he saw that he had made a mistake, and let his presence be known with:

"Zounds and zounds! what is it?"

"The Fatal Frigate, sir, is whipping the French vessels, Minerva and Rajah," said Major Branscombe with a wicked smile.

"Impossible!"

"No, admiral, for the Rajah has struck, and it is a duel now between the Minerva and the Fatal Frigate."

"Zounds!"

The last exclamation was occasioned by the lighting up of the sea, by a terrific broadside from the Fatal Frigate, which now bore down to close quarters, and a moment after the two splendid vessels were lashed together, their guns still roaring, small-arms rattling, cheers echoing, and the glare causing them to appear to be on fire.

"Lonsdale has boarded!" yelled some one.

"The Frenchman has struck!" shouted Major Branscombe, for the firing ceased.

"Perhaps not the Frenchman," sneered the admiral's son

"We will soon know," and in breathless silence all waited.

The dawn was at hand now, and soon three vessels were seen coming into port

In the lead was the Fatal Frigate, and she was towing the Rajah, with the Minerva bringing up the rear.

But the British flag floated over each deck.

The Fatal Frigate had won.

CONCLUSION.

A WORD, my kind reader, and my story is ended.

That word will tell you that the gallant victory won by Lionel Lonsdale raised the brand of outlawry from him, and added greater fame to his name.

As for Frank Fenton he needed but one other blow to add to his wretchedness, and that was when he received Belle Vernon's answer to his offer of marriage.

It was *no* for the admiral's son, but *yes* for the commander of the Fatal Frigate.

THE END.

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